FAILING CHILDREN?

A STUDY OF THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN RESIDENTIAL CARE

JOE FRANCIS

A THESIS PRESENTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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I certify that this thesis
has been written by me
and is my own work

Joe Francis

ABSTRACT

This study has investigated the educational experiences and circumstances of a sample of twenty-eight young people in seven residential care homes in a large local authority in Scotland. All of the young people were secondary school aged.

Research indicates that children looked after away from home are at a particular educational disadvantage. In comparison with their peers they tend to be behind in their attainments, leave school with fewer qualifications and be more at risk of being excluded from school (HMI/SWSI, 2001). This study therefore sought to consider how the young people in the sample were faring educationally and whether the Looking After Children (LAC) materials made a positive contribution to the educational progress of a sub-set. The degree to which these aims were met during the investigation is mixed, reflecting variations in the quality of available information across the study sample and highlighting a general concern about the standard of record keeping in both social work and education departments in the study authority. The data obtained in the study provide a rich picture of the experiences and backgrounds of the young people together with important insights into their in-care experience so far as it relates to their education. These data concern the backgrounds and home circumstances of the young people, their reasons for coming into contact with social work services, their school experiences before and after coming into care, issues relating to their care placements and details of the interplay between their school and care careers.

A range of research methods was used in the study, including the examination of documentary sources of data, semi-structured qualitative interviews and a quasi-experiment design. These methods were chosen to maximise the likelihood of achieving the study aims. The results show that many of the young people's lives prior to placement in local authority care were characterised by socio-economic disadvantage, most had experienced fractured family relationships and a relatively high proportion had experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse. Difficulties at school were apparent from an early age for a relatively high proportion of young people in the sample. There was little evidence of effective measures of early intervention in school and behaviour difficulties, both at home and at school, featured in a high proportion of the sample. Inordinately high exclusion rates among the young people in the study meant that many of them spent too much time out of school. Record keeping in both social work and education departments in the study authority was poor. Communication between frontline staff in social work and education was not well established and there were some indications that there was a lack of trust between the two groups. The data also suggest that the priority afforded to education by care workers and social workers was low.

With regard to the LAC materials, residential care staff were marginalized in the training and preparation process and this had a negative impact on their understanding of the method and their capacity to use the materials. While there was broad agreement among the residential workers interviewed that the approach was useful for engaging young people in work about their education, it seemed that the participation of parents and other professionals did not occur on a meaningful level. Data obtained through interviews suggest that one of the major strengths of the LAC materials is their potential capacity to facilitate a sense of agreement about shared responsibilities. However, a major area of concern raised in the study is the disproportionate level of school exclusion experienced by looked after young people and from the views expressed by residential workers it is doubtful if the potential of the materials can be realised without the issue of exclusion being addressed on a broader strategic policy level.

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&

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> "Access to education is a basic right for every child. Too many of those cared for by local authorities are still being let down. They are being denied the same chances as other children. It is not acceptable that six out of ten young people leaving care at 16 and 17 are doing so without any qualifications". (Cathy Jamieson, Scottish Education Minister, Scottish Executive, 2003a)

Statement of the Research Problem

This study is about the educational experience and performance of a group of young people in residential child care. Political concern about the poor educational progress of children and young people who are cared for by public authorities, as the above comments by the former education minister for Scotland illustrate, has begun to assume significant proportions in the last few years. The Scottish Executive recently placed a requirement on local authorities to monitor the educational performance of this group of young people and information on the educational attainment of looked after children leaving care in Scotland was collected for the first time in the year ended 31 March 2002 (Scottish Executive, 2002a). Not all councils were able to provide figures at that time (or subsequently), however headline figures about Scotland gave a broad picture and show that in that year six out of ten 16 and 17 year old care leavers did not achieve any educational qualifications.

The most recent official statistics in Scotland (Scottish Executive, 2003b) continue to show that six out of ten young people who leave care have no qualifications and are not in education, employment or training. Commenting on these figures, the current Minister for Education and Young People in Scotland, Peter Peacock, said they are a terrible indictment of a system which still lets down too many children in care and condemns them to a life of difficulty (Scottish Executive, 2003b).

My own interest in undertaking a study of the educational experiences of young people in residential care stems from earlier involvement in a small-scale study of the education arrangements for looked after children in a large Scottish local authority (Francis *et al.,* 1996). That study highlighted similar concerns to those expressed above, finding not only that children's education was given a low priority but also that details on the attainment levels of the young people in the sample proved to be elusive in the extreme. School records seemed incomplete and unsystematic and all that could be said on the basis of the minimal information that was available was that these pupils were performing at a uniformly modest to poor level.

These findings were consistent with other research at that time (e.g. Aldgate *et al.,* 1993) which indicated that young people in public care do not fare well at school. The need for more detailed scrutiny of the circumstances and factors that give rise to this situation was, and remains, a highly important issue for those concerned with the welfare of children in public care and it therefore seemed appropriate to build on the limited work that I had undertaken at that time.

School Performance and Social Exclusion

The comments referred to above by both former and current ministers for education suggest that there is increasing recognition among senior politicians that one of the main challenges facing people working with children in public care is to raise the level of their educational attainment since this is perhaps the key to helping them achieve long-term stability and security in their lives.

It has been suggested that this increased level of political attention has arisen in a context of growing government disquiet about the needs of people who are affected by 'social exclusion'. The issue has therefore become an important area for research and policy because it is now widely acknowledged that there is a link between those who suffer from the broader social phenomenon of social exclusion and those who experience educational disadvantage in childhood (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998).

The concept of social exclusion encompasses what Brodie (2001) refers to as a 'constellation' of disadvantage including, poverty, poor housing, unemployment, and participation in sub-cultures associated with drugs and crime. Research has shown that the backgrounds of the majority of children entering the care system (see, for example, Packman and Hall, 1998) and the outcome experiences of many young people leaving the care system (see, for example, SSI/DOH, 1997) are frequently characterised by these features and there is now widespread agreement that failure to achieve a satisfactory standard of education during the period that they are in public care is the primary reason for their ongoing difficulties in later life.

There have been several tangible developments in recent years which may begin to help improve the educational performance of young people in public care. For example, since the fieldwork on which this thesis is based was undertaken, policy and legislation regarding young people in public care in Scotland have undergone a number of significant changes. The Children (Scotland) Act was fully implemented in April 1997 leading to increased emphasis on supporting the educational arrangements for looked after children (Scottish Office Regulations and Guidance, 1997); the educational attainment of looked after children was previously a neglected area of policy but is now regarded as a key issue in children's services plans; and central government now expects local authorities to produce evidence of progress in this area.

Improving the educational performance of children in local authority care has therefore assumed a higher political priority than previously and may also be seen as part of a broader political strategy to tackle social exclusion. However, despite attracting more attention at both central and local government levels, the issue remains relatively under-researched and there is a clear need to undertake more empirical work in order to improve the quality of future policy and practice.

That the issue merits further detailed study is not in doubt, in the writer's view, and the case for this is strengthened by current research findings. For example, the most recent investigation in Scotland (Dixon and Stein, 2002) has shown that young

people leaving care remain significantly educationally disadvantaged compared with their peers. Ongoing research (Harker *et al.*, 2003) shows that a significant proportion of children in public care continue to feel that their education is going badly and that being looked after is detrimental to their education.

Therefore, while government awareness of the problem has apparently increased in recent years, it does not seem that practice has always been sufficiently informed to bring about significant changes to the educational outcomes of this group of children. Hence, the provision of new empirical evidence is crucial. As Goddard (2000, cited in Brodie, 2001) has indicated, there is a danger that policy concerning the education of looked after children is moving ahead more quickly than the state of current knowledge. It is anticipated then, that the empirical data presented in this study will offer some new insights into the issue which may help to develop a deeper level of understanding in this field.

Justification for Investigation of the Topic

Despite the fact that, over a period of many years, there have been a number of studies that have examined the general circumstances and experiences of children who have been cared for away from their own families (e.g. Berridge, 1985; Berridge and Brodie, 1998; Kahan, 1979; Millham *et al*, 1986; Packman and Hall, 1998; Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998), it is only in the last fifteen years or so that the poor educational arrangements and progress of this group of children has become widely recognised. As already stated, the level of political and academic interest in the subject has therefore just begun to take on a degree of increased urgency during the last few years.

That the issue has only recently gained greater prominence in research literature and in policy initiatives is not to say, however, that the poor educational performance of children in the care system is a new phenomenon. Indeed, the collective evidence emerging from a number of outcome studies conducted during the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's had already indicated (albeit within the context of wider issues) that

being in care carried a high risk of educational failure (e.g. Essen *et al.,* 1976; Ferguson, 1966; Pringle, 1965; Stein and Carey, 1986; Triseliotis, 1980; Triseliotis and Russell, 1984).

It appears that the endemic nature of the educational difficulties encountered by young people in public care remained largely obscure throughout that period because little attention was devoted in those studies to the specific issue of their educational experience. Indeed, in her extensive review of the literature in the 1980s, Jackson (1987) found that there was not one book published in Great Britain or the United States at that time that was solely concerned with the education of children in public care.

Following that review of the existing literature, Jackson (1987) was extremely critical of the then commonly held view that no more could be expected educationally from children with so many personal, family and social problems. Rather than subscribe to this view, she firmly attributed the children's difficulties to lack of appropriate input, encouragement and cooperation from those responsible for their education and care. Since then she and others have devoted much effort and time to investigating the educational difficulties experienced by looked after children and she has contributed greatly to our understanding through a number of important studies and publications (e.g. Jackson, 1989; Jackson, 1994; Jackson, 1995; Jackson (ed), 2001; Jackson and Sachdev, 2001).

Due largely to Jackson's persistence, the 1990's witnessed a number of significant indications that government, academics and professionals had begun to take the issue much more seriously and, as will be discussed in the next chapter, these years produced a modest intensification in academic research activity and also in policy and procedural guidance. For example, prompted by Jackson's work, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) first undertook research into the education of children in care in 1988/89 and the resultant report (Fletcher-Campbell and Hall, 1990), whilst able to highlight many pertinent issues, noted the lack of empirical evidence available at that time. Consequently, the investigators were

unable to describe mature, systematic good practice established throughout a local authority. However, returning to undertake further inquiry some years later, one of the authors was encouraged to find that research had prompted a burgeoning of relevant and maturing good practice and initiatives that were then proving to be effective (Fletcher-Campbell, 1997).

However, despite heightened awareness of the problem and a degree of increased empirical research activity, studies addressing the educational circumstances of looked after children remain relatively sparse. In a comprehensive review of the literature in the late 1990's, Borland *et al* (1998) identified only six key investigations on this issue in the UK at that time, with only one of these (Francis *et al.,* 1996) undertaken in Scotland. Since then, there has been just one further significant study conducted in Scotland (HMI/SWSI, 2001). There remains, therefore, a great deal to be examined in relation to this topic and this study will add to the still developing body of knowledge.

The Significance of the Problem

Notwithstanding the relative sparsity of research literature, the evidence that has been accumulated during recent years clearly demonstrates that both the scale and prevalence of the problem is not in question. A decade after Jackson first drew attention to the subject a literature review funded by the Scottish Office found consensus among researchers that the concerns about poor educational performance that had been identified in earlier research (though not exclusively focused on the educational arrangements of looked after children) were confirmed by more recent dedicated studies (Borland *et al*, 1998). As already stated, the comparative growth in the number of empirical studies conducted during the 1990's, and the alarming consistency of their findings, were extremely influential in fuelling a gathering political momentum and in augmenting calls for improvements in professional practice and standards. This heightened concern about the poor educational performance of children in public care both reflects and acknowledges the

importance of educational attainment as a basis for their security and stability in adulthood.

The most recent investigations in Scotland (HMI/SWSI, 2001, Dixon and Stein, 2002) have produced compelling evidence that young people in public care today fare no better, educationally, than their counterparts did two or three decades ago. One of these studies (Dixon and Stein, 2002) indicates that up to two-thirds of young people leaving care do so without any basic school qualifications and that many of their support workers are unaware of their level of educational attainment. The observation made by the Chief Inspector of Schools and the Chief Inspector of Social Work in Scotland that "the education of looked after children is not as good as it should be" (HMI/SWSI, 2001), therefore seems to be a major understatement of the prevailing situation.

According to Jackson and Sachdev (2001) the poor educational performance of children in the care system is encapsulated in the following statistical facts:

- Across the UK estimates indicate that up to 70% of children in foster care and more than 80% in residential care leave school without any qualifications (Marsh and Peel, 1999)
- Fewer than 20% of care leavers go on to further education and less than 1% go to university (Biehal *et al.,* 1995)
- Children in care are 10 times more likely to be excluded from school than their peers and as many as 30% are not attending mainstream schools because of truancy or exclusion (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998)
- Between 50% and 80% of care leavers are unemployed between the ages of 16 and 25 (Scottish Executive, 2000)

These findings leave us in little doubt then that, as we proceed into the 21st century, the educational progress of children in public care does not improve as a consequence of being looked after away from their natural families.

The Implications of Educational Failure – Why Does it Matter?

Educational performance is widely recognised as a major predictive factor in relation to the future life chances of an individual. The second half of the 20th century saw education come to play an increasingly prominent role in young people's lives with major changes in the education system such as; raising the school leaving age to 16 in 1972; increases in the average length of schooling; and; increases in the number of young people going on to further and higher education. All of these developments have had a significant impact on the qualifications profile of young people in Britain.

Prior to 1972 many young people left school at the age of 15 without sitting any examinations. In the twenty years that followed, the proportion of school leavers leaving without qualifications fell by more than half (CSO, 1994). Recent Scottish Executive statistics (2001) show that the proportion of young people leaving publicly funded schools and entering full-time further or higher education has continued to rise - from 40 per cent in the period 1992-1993 to 52 per cent during 2000-2001. One explanation for the upward shift in both educational attainment and further education participation is that entry to the labour market has become increasingly dependent upon successful educational outcomes. The Scottish Young People's Surveys (SYPS), conducted biennially between 1977 and 1991, showed that 72% of the young people who left school at the minimum age in 1977 were in full-time employment by the spring of the following year. By 1991 this had declined to just 28 per cent (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997).

One of the major consequences of rising levels of educational attainment then, is that qualifications have become a crucial factor in facilitating entry to work and this has resulted in a more protracted process of transition from school to work than previously (Jones and Wallace, 1992). Conversely, low educational attainment has increasingly damaging consequences for individuals and can consign them to low-paid jobs or long-term unemployment. Young people who drop out of school without finishing a course of study, or who leave without relevant qualifications, run a higher

risk of being unemployed or trapped in low income work. Even if they find work fairly quickly, the jobs they take are often only short-lived.

Concern about young people's capacity to successfully navigate their way into the labour market therefore highlights a major reason for addressing the problems associated with under-achievement in school and ensuring wider educational opportunities for young people in public care. Much of the research into the outcomes for care leavers amply demonstrates the problem for this vulnerable group.

A recent government report (HMI/SWSI, 2001) found that between fifty and eighty per cent of young people leaving care in Scotland are unemployed between the ages of 16 and 25. Other research in the UK into the experiences of care leavers has also consistently found that this group is over-represented amongst the unemployed and under-represented in further or higher education (Biehal *et al.,* 1992; Broad, 1998; Stein, 1990; Stein and Carey, 1986). One study found that only two out of seventy-four young people in their sample had managed to find employment or continue in education at the first follow-up interview stage (Biehal *et al.,* 1995). The vast majority, over two thirds, failed to find stable work or training on leaving school and were either unemployed or in casual work.

Failure to obtain gainful employment is not the only concern associated with poor levels of educational attainment. Research which has examined outcomes for children in care (see for example, Biehal *et al.*, 1992; Biehal *et al.*, 1995; Dixon and Stein, 2002; Stein, 1990; Stein and Carey, 1986) has consistently demonstrated that young people leaving the care system find it extremely difficult to manage the transition to adulthood successfully and that their failure to achieve a sufficient level of educational success often means that they fare badly in many other aspects of their life. For example, figures published following an inspection of care leaver's services in nine local authorities in England and Wales (SSI/DOH, 1997) showed that almost one in five of young women leaving care were either pregnant or already mothers; a quarter of adult prisoners and 38% of young prisoners had been in care; and almost one in three young single homeless people were previously in care.

There can be little argument then that exploring the educational careers of children in public care is extremely important to those who are responsible for that care and that tackling this issue is vital to ensure that looked after young gain the best possible access to future life opportunities.

Purpose of the Research

This study incorporates two broad objectives. As already stated, recent research (e.g. HMI/SWSI, 2001; Dixon and Stein, 2002) indicates that children looked after away from home are at a particular educational disadvantage. In comparison with their peers they tend to be behind in their attainments, leave school with fewer qualifications and be more at risk of being excluded from school. Growing awareness of the educational problems of children in public care has occurred largely within a context of broader concerns about the poor outcome experiences of looked after children in a range of areas of their lives. However, the degree to which the cause of these poor experiences is understood is comparatively meagre.

The first objective of this study, therefore, was to consider how a group of young people in residential care was faring educationally and what factors were most likely to impede or enhance their educational progress. Accumulating research evidence, as will be shown in chapter two, suggests a number of possible explanations for the poor educational performance of children in public care and there is growing consensus that, rather than being attributable to a single causal factor, the poor performance of this group is associated with a complex interplay of personal, family, structural and social factors. The research undertaken here therefore sought to examine how these factors related to the experiences of the young people concerned, both before they entered public care and during their care experience.

The second main purpose of the research relates to the development and implementation of the 'Looking after Children' (LAC) materials. In the late 1980's, as part of a general drive to produce clearer and more objective information about outcomes for children in public care, the Department of Health sponsored an

independent working party to undertake development work on assessing outcomes in child care (Parker *et al.,* 1991). The working group produced a set of materials, the 'Looking After Children' materials, which incorporated a series of assessment instruments called 'Assessment and Action Records' (AARs). These assessment instruments, rooted in child development theory, were devised with the aim of improving the personal development and progress of children in care (including their educational progress).

The LAC materials are now widely used in local authorities throughout the UK and the Department of Health has recently expressed its confidence in the LAC approach by developing it into an 'integrated children's system' for recording and reviewing the progress of all children provided with a statutory service (Rose, 2002, cited in Bailey *et al.,* 2002).

One of the central purposes of this study, therefore, was to examine the impact of these materials (specifically the education section of the Assessment and Action Records) on the educational progress of a small sample of young people in residential care. As will be discussed in more detail later, achieving this proved to be a difficult undertaking and a number of obstacles and barriers conspired to prevent this objective being achieved to the extent that was initially intended.

Alongside this, however, the research sought to explore the experiences and views of staff who used the materials in order to develop a better understanding of how the materials might best be used in practice. At the time of writing, there has been limited empirical work (e.g. Ward, 1995; Wheelaghan *et al.,* 1999) on the experiences of care staff who are involved in the implementation and everyday use of the materials and this study aspired to add to that limited body of knowledge.

Organisation of the Thesis

This chapter has set the general context of the research by briefly explaining the significance, scale and prevalence of the problem that is addressed and by outlining the study's main purpose.

The second chapter identifies relevant literature that has informed and guided much of the conceptual and theoretical understanding of this topic. The chapter draws on material from a number of inter-connected fields of study and highlights key aspects of those studies that have examined the pre-care, in-care and post-care experiences of children and young people in the public care system. The chapter also details the history and development of the 'Looking After Children' materials and explains the relationship between the conceptual approach underpinning these materials and the general concerns about poor outcomes of looked after children.

Chapter three describes the legislative and policy context within which the field of study is set. Relevant social work and education legislation are outlined since acquiring understanding of the subject in question requires knowledge of the duties and responsibilities placed on local authorities and these duties clearly straddle both domains.

The fourth chapter provides a detailed account of the research design, the methods adopted and the conduct of the study. Chapters five, six, seven and eight present the main features of the data arising from the investigation.

Chapters nine and ten summarise and discuss the study's key findings and highlight three particular issues which are given detailed consideration. The first, the question of resilience, draws on an ecological model - encompassing the child, the family, and the environment - as a theoretical framework for considering the relationship between different dimensions of the experiences of the young people in the study.

The issue of school exclusion, representing as it does a major concern arising from the study findings, is also examined in some detail. The main reasons for school exclusion are considered both in relation to the circumstances of the young people in the sample and to looked after children more generally. The relationship between 'school exclusion' and 'social exclusion' is then examined.

Discussion of the need for 'inclusive' policies in schools, drawing on literature from within the more general field of special education, examines the specific needs and issues affecting young people in the study and asks whether the time has come for children in public care to be included in the definition of children with special educational needs.

The concluding chapter provides a brief overview of the study, considers some of the limitations of the research, identifies key aspects of the knowledge arising from the investigation and summarises the main recommendations and implications of the findings for future research, policy and practice.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

> "Our review of research over the past 20 years highlights consistent weaknesses in the care and education systems which have made school an unhappy experience for too many children looked after away from home. It is quite clear that until very recently the education of children in public care was seriously neglected. As we have found in reviewing the evidence, there is a consistent picture of low attainment, denial of mainstream schooling, lack of concern and encouragement from social workers, and placements that offer inadequate support and encouragement. More positive research findings have been hard to identify" (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001, p138).

Introduction

As indicated in chapter one, concerns about how children in public care fare within the education system have been increasing since Jackson (1987) first drew attention to this issue in the late 1980's. Prior to that time, although some research had alluded to the poor educational progress of this group of children (e.g. Berridge, 1985; Essen *et al.,* 1976; Ferguson, 1966; Pringle, 1965; Stein and Carey, 1986; Triseliotis, 1980; Triseliotis and Russell, 1984), there was no specific focus on this field of study. Consequently, as Jackson discovered in her literature search, there was not a single book on this topic at that time.

Subsequent research activity and political interest in the subject has ensured that there is now a somewhat larger pool of relevant literature, most of which demonstrates that looked after children have very poor school experiences. However, in spite of increased interest in the issue, relatively speaking this is still an under-researched field. Such empirical material that exists is confined mainly to the period spanning the last fifteen years and, as Borland *et al.* (1998) point out, is lacking in a number of important aspects. For instance, apart from a handful of recent studies (Harker *et al.,* 2003; Jackson and Sachdev, 2001; Martin and Jackson, 2002) we still

have little understanding of the views of the young people or their families. There is then, still much to be addressed and while consideration of the material that follows in this chapter provides understanding of the main themes and issues relating to the topic, it also demonstrates that there are significant gaps in our knowledge. In order to set this material in context, the review begins with a general discussion of literature relating to residential child care.

Residential Child Care

One of the main difficulties identified during the conduct of this literature review is the general tendency, at least where the issue of educational performance is concerned, for looked after children to be regarded as a homogenous group. Official statistics and policy documents generally do not distinguish between different groups of looked after children when addressing this subject and, while existing research has highlighted a number of important factors concerning the educational experiences of *all* looked after children, studies, in the main, have not separated out the experiences of young people in different types of care settings.

That the majority of studies have not differentiated between groups of children in different care placements, particularly those in residential or foster care, has proved problematic in terms of developing a more decisive understanding of the way that particular factors affect children in these circumstances. So, while the focus of the research reported in this thesis has been young people in residential care, it has not always proved easy to access literature that relates solely to the educational experiences of this sub-group of looked after children. That being said, literature relating to the educational experiences of looked after children more generally and to the broader circumstances of young people in residential care, has proved significant in developing a clearer understanding of the issues and has also been useful in providing contextual information that has relevance for the topic in question.

Residential Child Care Services in Scotland

The latest official statistics show that Scottish local authorities looked after almost 11,700 children at 31 March 2004, representing just over one per cent of all children under 18. The majority, 10,108, were cared for in the community either by their own families, friends or relatives (6,408) or by foster carers (3,461). Thirteen per cent (1,567) were placed in residential establishments. Young people living in residential care therefore represent only a small proportion of all looked after children. Despite this, in 2002-03 a third of overall children's social work expenditure in Scotland was spent on residential accommodation (Scottish Executive, 2004).

Recent Trends

As elsewhere in the UK (and in some parts of Europe) residential child care in Scotland has undergone major changes in the last thirty years. In the mid-1970s, over 6,300 children and young people were cared for in residential establishments at any one point in time. By the end of the 1980s, this had fallen dramatically to less than a third of this number and the most recent national figures (Scottish Executive, 2004) show that the figure has now fallen to around a quarter. During the same period the balance between foster care and residential care also changed significantly. In 1976, almost twice as many children and young people were in residential care compared to those in foster care - the reverse is true today. Similar figures for England and Wales show that there was a sharp reduction in the number of children in residential care, from 60,000 in 1970 to 13,000 in 1990 (Bullock *et al.,* 1993a) and to less than 10,000 by 2000 (DoH, 2001a).

Alongside the fall in the number of children resident in care homes, there has been a reduction in the overall number of residential establishments in the UK. In the mid-1970s, there were 288 care establishments in Scotland whereas currently there are 203. The reduction in the number of homes is not proportionate to the fall in number of residents but this can be explained by the long-term decrease in the size of residential establishments, falling from an average of 25 places in the 1970s to an average of 10 places today (Scottish Executive, 2004). Figures for England show that

at 31 March 2000 there were 1,146 children's homes, 7% less than in 1997 (DoH, 2001b).

Many of the changes occurring in residential child care in the UK have been witnessed elsewhere in Western Europe and over recent years a number of authors have examined the widespread trend towards decreasing use of residential child care. This trend has often been linked to concerns about poor standards of care in residential homes or to the not insubstantial costs of providing residential care. Similarly, the increased use of foster care, the development of other forms of alternative community provision and the changing population of children and young people in need of child welfare services have also been considered (Colton and Hellinckx, 1993; Hellinckx, 2002; Madge, 1994; Pringle, 1998; Sellick, 1998). The marginalisation of residential child care in many countries has led one commentator to conclude that, 'what is left of the residential care systems arouses suspicions and a sense that they are no more than a necessary evil' (Hellinckx, 2002, 76).

The Role of Residential Child Care - Meeting the Needs of Young People

Despite the apparent shift away from the use of residential provision and the fact that the number of children and young people in residential care at any one time has fallen, official statistics show that residential care remains an important option with a high turnover of large numbers of young people. The number of admissions to residential establishments in Scotland has increased dramatically over the last fifteen years or so, from 3,870 admissions in 1989, to 12,608 in the year to 31 March 2004. The number of discharges in the year to 31 March 2004 was 12,537 (Scottish Executive, 2004) showing that, unlike earlier years, the vast majority of children and young people now stay in residential care for short periods of time. A similar pattern has been discerned in England (Berridge and Brodie, 1998).

Combined with changes in the pattern of residential care placements, the last thirty years have witnessed significant changes in the needs of young people placed in residential settings. Residential child care establishments are now occupied by a predominantly male, adolescent population many of whom present a range of

complex behavioural problems which often appear to stem from unmet physical, emotional and psychological needs. Drawing comparisons with a sample of young people in residential care in the 1980s, Berridge and Brodie (1998) noted that the children's home population a decade later was far more complex and problematic. This view was shared by Packman and Hall (1998) who, reporting on the emotional state of young people in residential care, found a high percentage of children exhibiting disturbing behavioural problems associated with their health or development. Another investigation at that time also observed that many of the young people exhibited a range of emotional and behavioural problems and were prone, among other things, to; harming others; destroying property; exclusion from school; and disruptive behaviour at school (Whitaker *et al.,* 1998). In a comprehensive review of post-war residential child care research, Bullock *et al.* (1993a) concluded that many young people in residential care now present with special difficulties or are *in extremis*. It is unsurprising, then, that behavioural control is a major issue in most residential child care settings and a number of establishments in Scotland are currently developing cognitive behavioural programmes to address behavioural issues, such as working with sexually aggressive young men (Kendrick & Mair, 2002).

Apart from difficulties relating to their emotional and behavioural development, recent research has also shown that young people in residential care suffer some of the worst health outcomes of all children, with unacceptably high levels of long term illness and high levels of unmet and neglected health needs (Residential Health Care Project, 2004). High levels of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections have been reported; many young people in care engage in risk-taking activities such as alcohol and drug misuse; and there is a very high incidence of mental health difficulties (ibid). All of these factors aggravate their physical and emotional vulnerability, yet young people in residential care have poor access to specialist health care and mental health services. The results of the Residential health Care Project and other recent work (e.g. Grant, Ennis and Stuart, 2002) are contributing to measures aimed at improving the health outcomes of children and young people in

residential care but this activity is still at a relatively early stage and much remains to be done.

Given the degree of disadvantage and difficulty associated with many other aspects of their lives, it is not coincidental that there are also major concerns about the educational performance of this group. Noting the poor school progress of children in his influential work on children's homes in the mid-'80s, Berridge (1985) observed that improving the educational arrangements for children in residential care would help to ameliorate the adverse effects of other aspects of their lives and offer an avenue of social mobility. During the early part of the 1990s a series of official government reports (Skinner, 1992; Utting, 1991; Warner, 1992) highlighted the importance of addressing the educational needs of children in public care. These reports were particularly critical of practice in residential care and called upon service providers to ensure that education was seen as a vital integral aspect of a child's placement and not an optional add-on. In spite of these earlier entreaties, the educational outcomes for this group of children has remained very poor and failure to adequately address young people's educational needs continues to be a matter of great concern (Dixon and Stein, 2002; Francis *et al,* 1996; Francis, 2000).

Messages from Research

The changing nature of residential provision, coupled with the poor outcomes outlined above and concerns expressed by the reports of a number of investigations and inquiries during the early 1990s, prompted the government to commission a programme of research to help establish an evidence base from which to plan future residential child care services (DoH, 1998). The studies encompassed within that programme examined a wide range of factors and issues pertaining to residential child care including (among others); the structure, culture and dynamics of children's homes (Brown et al., 1998; Whitaker *et al.,* 1998); the attributes of effective residential care (Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998); the experiences of young people leaving care (Biehal *et al.,* 1995); and outcomes for young people placed in secure accommodation (Bullock et al., 1998).

This programme of research, and other investigations undertaken since then (e.g. Emond, 2002 & 2003; Hayden *et al.,* 1999; Watson, 2003), has added to the body of available knowledge about how children's residential care establishments operate. A number of key themes can been discerned within the literature which point the way to the delivery of more effective residential child care. Aspects of these have particular relevance for the educational experience of looked after children and young people including; the structure and scale of children's homes; the 'mix' of resident groups; culture and morale; teamwork; peer and family contacts; and effective management.

Structure and Scale

As indicated earlier, there has been an increasing trend in the last thirty years or so towards small-scale residential homes and evidence arising from a number of investigations suggests that this has enhanced the quality of care in children's homes (e.g. Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998; Watson, 2003). In a recent study of 9 residential care homes in two local authorities in Scotland, Watson (op cit) reported that staff in small-scale units perceived this as a positive benefit. In particular, they indicated that working in smaller units reduced the degree of negative peer pressure that young people experienced and enhanced the scope for developing one-to-one work and relationship building between staff and residents. However, there is no evidence from this or other research that reducing the size of children's homes has resulted in better educational outcomes for young people. Recent outcome studies show that young people continue to fare badly in this area (Dixon and Stein, 2002) and earlier research (Triseliotis and Russell, 1984) indicated that, where education was concerned, larger scale residential schools were more likely to produce better results than residential homes. This is clearly an area that merits further investigation. My own view is that while the move towards small-scale children's homes is generally to be welcomed, it is unlikely that this alone will improve the educational outcomes of looked after children. Apart from reducing their size, residential establishments need to be staffed by workers who take a keen interest in the young people's educational performance, are capable of forging strong links with their local schools and are willing to encourage an ethos which places education high on the list of priorities.

Resident Groups

Research evidence suggests that, while it is not impossible to accommodate young people with a range of different care needs in the same establishment, it is important that staff have a clear understanding of what these needs are and that they are appropriately equipped to address them (Bullock *et al.,* 1998). Moreover it is important that there is a balanced 'mix' of residents which takes account of their strengths and vulnerabilities (Whitaker *et al.,* 1998). Failure to maintain an appropriate balance in the mix of residents can result in severe difficulties for young people, including bullying and sexual abuse (Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998). These difficulties can, in turn, have a severely debilitating impact on their educational performance. Anecdotal evidence (and my own experience) suggests that some young people with no previous history of educational difficulties can develop problems after they are placed in residential homes. While this often reflects the low level of priority given to education, it is also frequently a consequence of negative peer pressure. Research undertaken by Hayden and her colleagues (1999) seems to bear this out, finding that young people were more likely to report their education had improved when they felt settled and safe in their placements.

Culture and Morale

One of the factors described as 'fundamental' to outcomes for young people in residence is the 'culture' of the residential establishment (DoH, 1998). Studies and official reports have consistently stated that having clearly defined statements of aims and objectives is a crucial pre-requisite for promoting a positive culture in children's homes. Moreover, research indicates that is important to give regular attention to features such as the ambience of the setting; the sense of well-being that the young people experience; and the quality of the relationships between all of the staff and residents (DoH, 1998). Maintaining high levels in each of these areas is likely to result in better staff morale, as is the provision of regular supervision and providing staff with the opportunity to engage in extended activities such as care planning, counselling, contact with families, and after-care support (Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998).

Consideration of the young person's perspective has shown that it is important that homes promote a culture that values their privacy and gives them the opportunity to speak with staff who are willing to listen and keep them safe from bullying and peer pressures (Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998). Interestingly, the views of young people in another study (Berridge and Brodie, 1998) suggest that the presence or absence of a positive culture in a children's home may have a greater impact on the quality of care provided than high staffing ratios. In the writer's view, striving to ensure a positive culture in children's homes is essential for improving outcomes in all aspects of the young people's live and must inevitably have a beneficial impact on their schooling.

Teamwork

In addition to promoting an affirmative culture, the need to achieve consistency and strong teamwork among staff has also been highlighted as a vital requirement for enhancing the quality of care in residential settings (Watson, 2003). It is widely accepted that getting staff to agree on how tasks should be undertaken and then to operate in ways that maintain consistent routines and boundaries, is likely to produce a healthy environment for young people's social and emotional development. Failure to achieve effective team practice in a residential care setting can result in a more controlling, containing environment which can have a negative impact on several aspects of the residents' performance and behaviour, including their education.

Peer and Family Contact

Studies have frequently demonstrated that young people in residential care suffer from feelings of isolation, loneliness and stigma. Furthermore, placement in a care setting can deprive them of a sense of worth which they might otherwise derive from participation in family and community life and the associated responsibilities. It has increasingly been accepted, therefore, that maintaining family and community links is important, particularly if reunification is the goal (Bullock *et al.,* 1993). Yet a recent study of 71 looked after children and young people in one local authority in England found that one-quarter of the young people did not visit friends or have friends visit; 1 in 10 had no family contact; and over half would have welcomed more contact with others in their family (Baldry and Kemmis, 1997).

More recently, it has become apparent that attention must also be given to the potentially beneficial effects of peer relations within the residential context. While much of the focus in previous studies has tended to highlight the harmful effects of peer relationships in regard to school performance, an ethnological study of children in residential care found that young people regarded the resident group as an important force in their day-to-day lives, their view of themselves and of their social world (Emond, 2003). This study serves as a useful reminder that it is important to explore ways of harnessing the more positive features of the support and sustenance that may be available within the peer group.

Effective Management

The standard and efficiency of management is another of the key indicators of quality in residential provision. A number of studies have found that managers who are open and accessible, provide leadership and direction, are supportive and yet encourage staff to take responsibility for their work practices, are likely to contribute greatly to the effectiveness of the establishment (Brown et al., 1998; Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998; Watson, 2003). However, a study of 48 children's homes in 5 local authorities in England (Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998) found that in many cases it is difficult for managers to achieve these aims because of problems such as lack of autonomy and unclear or conflicting remits. The researchers concluded that positive outcomes were more likely to occur where the heads of homes had a coherent philosophy of how changes could be achieved and were in agreement with senior managers about how the home should be run. Moreover, it was important for the heads of homes to be sensitive to the needs and concerns of residents and capable of winning the support and confidence of the staff team.

Summary

Residential care in the UK has changed radically in the last thirty years, children's homes are much smaller; they are populated by a mainly male, adolescent group; young people stay for shorter periods; and their needs are more complex and challenging than previously. Despite the drive towards alternative forms of family and community care, local authorities still rely heavily upon residential provision as

a crucial part of the spectrum of care provision and increasing numbers of young people are moving rapidly in and out of residential homes. Outcome studies continue to show that there are many failings in the system but there is now general agreement about what is required to improve the quality of children's homes. In brief;

- Homes should preferably be small
- They must provide a secure, caring, comfortable environment
- There must be an absence of bullying and delinquency
- There must be a clear statement of agreed/shared objectives
- Staff roles and responsibilities must be clear
- Residents should be involved in school or work and;
- Their emotional and psychological needs must be attended to as well as their physical care needs

The Scope of the Literature Review

The comparative paucity of literature relating to the education of children in public care is a reflection of the extent to which the matter has been given scant attention in policy and practice in the past and this, in itself, is an important point. One of the consequences of receiving little government attention is that, to date, contributions to the empirical understanding of this topic in the UK have been based entirely on small-scale studies conducted both in Scotland (Francis *et al.,* 1996; HMI/SWSI, 2001) and in England and Wales (Aldgate *et al.,* 1993; Berridge *et al.,* 1997; Evans, 2000; Fletcher-Campbell and Hall, 1990; Fletcher-Campbell, 1997; Harker *et al.,* 2003; Jackson, 1994; Jackson and Roberts, 2000; Rees, 2001).

The writer has come to recognise and agree that, as suggested by Quinton *et al,* (1997, cited in Jackson and Sachdev, 2001) these small-scale studies are part of a process of developing a field of research. The process entails several stages of refinement and usually commences with a number of small-scale descriptive studies that are the precursors to research using larger and more systematically recruited

samples. The evolutionary and incremental nature of this process does not, however, occur in a vacuum and besides the emerging body of literature on the educational performance of children in public care, several related areas of literature are relevant to the research that is reported here. These are discussed in this chapter and include:

- The Backgrounds of Children who are 'Looked After'
- Educational Outcomes of Young People Leaving Care and their Transition to Employment
- In-Care Factors Influencing the Poor Educational Performance of Looked After Children
- School Exclusion
- Resilience Theory
- The 'Looking After Children' Materials

Given that it has been found in some studies (e.g. Aldgate *et al.,* 1993; Brodie, 2001) that young people may come to the care experience with a history of educational difficulties, the chapter begins with an examination of studies that have considered the background circumstances of children who are looked after away from their families.

This part of the discussion highlights features that typify the family backgrounds and environments of the young people concerned and considers the evidence which suggests that educational disadvantage is a feature in their lives before they are placed in care. This section also examines some of the possible explanations for this, including research evidence that has established connections between social class disadvantage and poor educational attainment.

The next part of the chapter refers to studies that have examined the leaving care outcomes for children who have been looked after, showing that a very high proportion of young people leave their care placements without any qualifications,

thus indicating that they do not generally benefit educationally from their time in public care. The harmful effects of leaving care with poor educational outcomes are also considered.

Research which has attempted to explain the causes of poor educational performance among children while they are in the care system is then explored, showing that there is a complex interplay of factors including placement instability, pre-care experiences, the expectations and views of professionals, poor educational support in residential establishments and problems linked to corporate parenting and ineffective communication.

The inordinately high levels of school exclusion among children who are looked after by local authorities is next examined and this section illustrates that young people in public care appear to suffer a degree of structural inequality in relation to their education as a consequence of being excluded from the mainstream. It is recognised, though, that not all children in local authority care are excluded from school or necessarily fare badly in relation to their education. The writer therefore considers it important to explore those factors that may lead to successful or unsuccessful educational outcomes for different children. The penultimate section of the literature review therefore discusses the value of resilience theory as a means of understanding why different outcomes may result for children facing similar levels of adversity.

Finally, discussion of the literature on the 'Looking After Children' materials is included. This incorporates some of the background and history of the materials, together with a brief critique of the social, political and theoretical bases of the materials and discussion of recent research findings.

The Backgrounds of Children who are 'Looked After'

The knowledge that children who are admitted to care are already likely to be affected by a variety of problems which may have a detrimental effect in relation to

their school performance is not particularly new. Indeed, an examination of the findings of a number of studies that have considered the circumstances of children coming into care during the last three decades (Bebbington and Miles, 1989; Berridge and Brodie, 1998; Brodie, 2001; Fanshel and Shinn, 1978; Mapstone, 1969; Packman, 1968; Packman *et al.,* 1986; Packman and Hall, 1998) gives a clear indication why it is not surprising that these children have encountered difficulties in their school careers. In general, the research provides strong evidence that children who are placed in public care are multiply disadvantaged and come from families that are characterised by marital discord and breakdown, poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing, health problems, overcrowding, social isolation and other forms of social deprivation.

In the mid 1980's, Packman *et al* (1986) highlighted the degree of poverty, stress and family disruption which typified the circumstances of families in their study of child care decision making in two local authorities in England. Much earlier work by Packman (1968) that had addressed similar findings was compared twenty years later in a study in which Bebbington and Miles (1989) examined the family backgrounds of 2500 children admitted to care in England and Wales. They concluded that broken families, poor housing, unemployment, single-parenthood, poverty and mixed-race origins were the features which were most common among the children who had been received into care.

The circumstances leading to children being looked after away from home are usually complex and combine personal, family and environmental stresses. Triseliotis *et al* (1995) found that the main difficulties that led to the young people in their study being admitted to care were; home/family based problems (45%); behaviour in the community, including offending and drug use (39%); and school problems, including behavioural difficulties and non-attendance (16%).

Borland *et al*, (1998) found that although relatively few children come directly into care as a consequence of neglect or abuse, these are often features of their lives. Additionally, in four out of five cases where young people were placed in care

because of offending or truancy, they found family based problems. Where young people were referred because of non-attendance or misbehaviour in schools, these often exacerbated problems at home and led to parents feeling they were unable to cope.

Official statistics for the year in which the fieldwork for this study first began show that the majority of voluntary admissions to care were due to parents being 'unable to cope' (Scottish Office Statistical Bulletin, 1996). For those admitted under compulsory measures, the main reasons were; 'beyond parental control' (38%); 'truancy' (28%); 'lack of parental care' (17%); and 'offending' (9%). As can be seen from these figures, the circumstances leading to care episodes reflect high levels of family dysfunction and also the number of children coming into care on truancy grounds at that time constituted a significant proportion of compulsory admissions. Although these figures separate factors leading to placement into single categories, evidence suggests that these factors are frequently inter-related and that home circumstances are crucial in relation to the educational progress of children and young people.

The impact of family background on the educational performance of children in the general population is well established in the literature (see for example Bynner *et al.,* 2002). Similarly, emphasis on the degree of educational disadvantage resulting from impoverished family and social circumstances before young people come into public care can be found in a number of early studies (e.g. Mapstone, 1969; Osborn and St. Clair, 1987). The report of a later study conducted in a single authority in England (Aldgate *et al.*, 1992) highlighted the deleterious effects of the children's early histories and found that children were bringing educational disadvantage into their foster care placements.

A similar finding was apparent in research conducted by Humberside County Council (1995) where more than half of the children in the sample who had experienced changes in school placements, experienced these changes before coming into care. In another study at that time, Kendrick (1995) found that one-quarter of the

school age children in his study had either been excluded or suspended before being placed in care, or were already in alternative educational provision. Half of the remainder were reported to have problems of non-attendance at school.

The results of a small-scale study in Lothian, (Francis *et al.,* 1996) also added to the evidence that pre-care experiences are a major factor in the poor educational performance of children in public care. That study found that more than three-quarters of the twenty-seven children in the sample were said to have school problems before they were taken into care and, in a substantial proportion of these cases, school difficulties contributed to the decision to place the child in care. Indeed, of those children who were said to be having school problems, a significant number were excluded from school at the time of their admission to care and several others had previously experienced periods of exclusion (Francis *et al.,* 1996). These findings echoed concerns raised earlier by Berridge (1985) who noted that education and social services are often closely interlinked and that many young people are precipitated into the care system because of truancy or disruptive behaviour at school.

The concerns highlighted by these studies appear to persist at present. For example, in a recent examination of the experience of school exclusion among a group of seventeen young people in residential care (Brodie, 2001) it was found that the sample had all come from damaged backgrounds and had experienced traumatic circumstances. A high proportion of the group had experienced abuse, most had difficulties due to relationship problems at home and many had experiences of breakdown in family relationships. In all of the cases examined it was found that, without exception, the young people had histories of disrupted schooling and 11 of the 17 had previously experienced periods of temporary or permanent exclusion.

The impact of impoverished and damaging home circumstances on the educational performance of children is not an exclusively British phenomenon. For example, in their extensive five year longitudinal study of children in foster care in the United States, Fanshel and Shinn (1978) noted that many of the children came from

backgrounds which had included violence and disorganisation and they, too, found that these children were already educationally disadvantaged at the time they were admitted to care. More recently, work on a project that aims to raise the educational performance of children in out-of-home placements across fourteen states in America found that 98% of the children had experienced abuse or neglect, two-thirds had been formally diagnosed as having psychiatric or psychological disorders and nearly a quarter had a learning disability (Pecora and Prohn, 1998, cited in Jackson and Sachdev, 2001).

Reports in England and Wales that have highlighted concerns about the underachievement of black children in care (e.g. Rampton, 1981; Commission for Racial Equality, 1988) have attributed their under-performance to factors such as poor economic and social conditions as well as institutional racism within the education system and high levels of racial abuse within or around schools. While these reports throw some light on the experience of this particular group of looked after children, on the whole the needs of black children in the care system remain largely neglected and our understanding of their educational experiences is, at best, extremely limited. However, despite the lack of formal research evidence there is anecdotal evidence that black and ethnic minority children in public care suffer from even more severe academic neglect (Lee Comfort, 2001, in Jackson (ed) 2001).

Unfortunately, the situation regarding the ethnic profile of young people in public care in Scotland is not at all clear. The Scottish Executive only began to collect data about the ethnic backgrounds of looked after children in their annual Children Looked After (CLA) returns in 2000. These show that currently 1.5 per cent of looked after children are from minority ethnic groups, compared to three per cent of the population. However, the CLA returns include the category 'ethnicity not known'. In the year 2000, the ethnicity of 3,262 looked after children was reported as 'not known' and in the most recent returns (2003) the ethnicity of 2,031 of the 11,388 looked after children was 'not known'. Moreover, the data are not cross-referenced for groups of children in different care settings so it is not possible to give

a breakdown of the ethnic origins of children in residential care or other care placements.

Currently, therefore, although the Scottish Executive requires it, it is still the case that many local authorities do not monitor the number of looked after children from ethnic minority groups. This problem was first reported in a relatively recent survey of local authorities and voluntary child care organisations in Scotland (Singh and Patel, 1998), where it was found that only 53% of local authorities and 77% of voluntary organisations monitored the numbers of black and minority ethnic children who used their services. This is certainly an area that requires further investigation, particularly so in the Scottish context given the differences in the ethnic minority population from that in England and Wales.

Another area that would also greatly benefit from more detailed scrutiny is that of the gender differences in the educational experiences of young people in public care. Although official statistics (Scottish Executive, 2003c) show that, for at least fifteen years, boys have consistently constituted two-thirds of the residential care population in Scotland, the only major review of residential child care in Scotland in recent years (Skinner, 1992) did not allude to gender differences as a significant issue meriting particular attention. Similarly, although Borland *et al* (1998) noted that there is a need for more differentiated studies of specific groups of children, taking account of such factors as age and type of placement, they did not specifically mention gender as a distinct category. In fact it is true to say that, in general, researchers and policymakers have given little attention to differences in the experiences of boys and girls in public care.

There are then some notable gaps in the available research information, such as ethnicity and gender, which require more detailed investigation. However, notwithstanding these gaps, all those studies that have considered the circumstances of children in public care concur that the broad social and environmental conditions affecting the majority of them before coming into care are disadvantageous to their general development. In particular, there are clear indications that the detrimental

social circumstances afflicting their families impairs their ability to provide stimulating and supportive environments for their children's educational development and a high proportion of young people admitted to care already have established educational problems. It would certainly seem that the government has long accepted this analysis and a Department of Health Circular (1993) concerning the education of children who are being looked after by local authorities has noted that many children being looked after *enter care behind in their education.*

From the arguments made in all of the existing literature then, it appears that the barriers to learning that many experience in their home backgrounds do indeed constitute a significant factor in relation to the poor performance of young people accommodated by local authorities. The conclusion that has been drawn from most of the work to date is that early intervention is necessary to help counteract the effects of deprivation and that additional support measures need to be put in place during the child's care placement in order to compensate for the deficits that they bring with them (Aldgate *et al.,* 1993; Francis *et al.,* 1996).

There are some encouraging indications to support the case for additional support measures. For example, a recent project in Bristol (2003) found that where children received such support measures their levels of attainment improved significantly. In that project, a range of services was provided to a group of 30 primary school aged looked after children during the school year 2001-2002. These included:

- 45 minutes 1-1 teaching a week for between half to one term
- Home-school liaison and support
- Catch-up support
- SEN support
- EBD and Learning support

In all but two of the cases, the children met or exceeded the targets that had been set. One child increased her reading age by 2 years and 2 months and her spelling age by 10 months. The results reported in this project are very encouraging and suggest that structured learning support can help to counteract some of the disadvantage arising in previous home circumstances.

The question that remains to be tested with this group of children is whether gains made during the primary stages of their education will have a lasting compensatory effect. Research has indicated that the qualifications young people obtain at the age of sixteen are the most reliable predictor of the career direction that they will follow in adult life and that obtaining qualifications is significantly affected by the social class of their family and by other factors such as region, gender and race (Banks *et al* 1992; Jones, 2002; Roberts, 1993). As discussed earlier, young people entering the care system are drawn predominantly from the most deprived families and their educational attainment is often disadvantaged by these circumstances and by damaging pre-care experiences such as physical, emotional and sexual abuse (Brodie, 2001; Packman and Hall, 1998; Heath *et al* 1994; Stein 1993). Failure to overcome these early childhood disadvantages can have far reaching consequences for their stability and security in many aspects of their adult lives.

The relationship between social disadvantage and educational disadvantage has been established elsewhere in the literature. For example, in an important survey of the educational experiences of men in England and Wales, Halsey *et al,* (1980) examined the links between social class origins and destinations. Whilst the language and terms used in that study may not have much currency in contemporary debate about the relationship between social circumstances and educational performance, the findings are nonetheless relevant to the topic in question and carry some resonance at the present time. For example, the investigators found that the education of the child tends to resemble that of the parent and that those who obtain privileged forms of education themselves are also more likely to secure it for their children. Those children who come from the least privileged circumstances (not unlike those

described as being consistent with the backgrounds of children who are received into care) are more likely to have had less advantageous educational opportunities.

The view that parents with good educational experiences are more likely to provide the same for the children in their care is supported by the findings of a study of children in stable foster care placements (Aldgate *et al.,* 1993). The researchers found that the stability of the placement was less significant in relation to the child's educational progress than the kind of educational experience that the carer had.

Another feature of social disadvantage that Halsey *et al* (1980) demonstrated was that, not surprisingly, the length of time that the boys in their study remained at school was a significant factor in determining the degree of educational success achieved by them. In other words, those boys who stayed at school beyond the minimum school leaving age were more likely to acquire better educational qualifications. Conversely, those who left at the minimum school leaving age were less likely to have obtained qualifications. The data also showed that the boys who were most likely to leave school at the earliest opportunity came from more socially disadvantaged circumstances and that economic factors appeared to be the major source of early leaving. More recently, Jones (2002) also found that the divergence between those who remain longer in education and gain qualifications and those who do not largely reflects inequalities in social class.

From all the available evidence, then, it does appear that children in public care are highly likely to suffer from educational disadvantage prior to their placement and that this is linked to the issues of social disadvantage and deprivation which are features in many of their families' circumstances. The relationship between social disadvantage and poor educational performance, which has also been identified in more general studies, indicates that the earlier effects of social and economic privations persist throughout the care experience. For example, the tendency for children from poorer backgrounds to leave school at an early age is a feature that is apparent in the population as a whole but, as the next section illustrates, is a particular feature of the experience of young people in public care.

Educational Outcomes of Young People Leaving Care and their Transition to Employment

Examination of the trends and patterns that have emerged from a number of outcome studies conducted in recent years shows that care leavers are significantly less likely to remain at school beyond the school leaving age than their peers.

For example, Stein and Carey (1986) looked at the educational experiences of 79 young people leaving care and found that they left school at the minimum leaving age and with little in the way of qualifications. This was true for children who had remained long in care as well as for those who were placed for shorter periods. In an earlier important study of the outcomes for children in foster care Triseliotis (1980) found that almost all the children left school at the earliest opportunity and very few had acquired educational qualifications that would stand them in good stead in adult life. More recently, an examination of the experiences of care leavers in Scotland (Dixon and Stein, 2002) found that the mean age for young people leaving care in their sample was a little over 16 years and ninety-four per cent had left care before they were eighteen years old.

A problem confronting researchers in this field is that, until recently, information about the educational performance of children in care has not been routinely gathered by local or central government agencies. Despite this, the evidence arising from research into the outcomes for children who have left the care system has consistently shown that, while in care, they remain educationally disadvantaged and this, in turn, leads to disadvantage in other areas of their lives after care (Biehal *et al*, 1995; Dixon and Stein, 2002; Essen *et al.,* 1976; Humberside County Council, 1995; Ofsted/SSI, 1995; Osborn and St. Clair, 1987; Stein, 1993; Stein and Carey, 1986; Triseliotis, 1980; Triseliotis and Russell, 1984).

Biehal (1995) and her colleagues examined the circumstances of 183 care leavers in three local authorities in England and reported that over half the children in their

study left school with no qualifications and the majority of the young people failed to establish themselves in education, work or training upon leaving school.

Similarly, research into the experience of young people being looked after by Humberside County Council (1995) found disturbing evidence of continued educational failure with almost half the sample group leaving school with no educational qualifications and only 48% obtaining at least one GCSE at grade A-G compared with 98% of the general year group in the county. For the children in the study group, less than half went on to further forms of education or training compared with 83% of the county's school leavers.

A recent study of 36 young care leavers in a large rural authority in England (Allen; 2003) found that few of the young people did well at school and most left school with few or no qualifications. These findings were echoed in the most recent study of the experiences of 107 young people leaving care in Scotland (Dixon and Stein, 2002), which found that:

- Almost two thirds of young people in the survey had no standard grade qualifications (the most basic level of school qualifications in Scotland)
- 83% had experiences of truancy
- 71% had experiences of being excluded from school
- A quarter of support workers were unaware of the educational attainment of the young person with whom they were working
- 73% of young people left care at 15 or 16 years of age

The importance of good educational experiences for young people in public care cannot be overstated in the current economic climate. The traditional pattern of direct entry into employment from school has altered greatly in recent years and Jones and Wallace (1992) suggest that this has now been replaced by a variety of means of transition, based principally around education and training. Indeed, according to Jones (2002) there is an increasing polarisation between young people who stay on in

education and gain qualifications and those who leave school at 16 or 17. The latter young people risk bad jobs, low pay and unemployment.

The new pathways into work that have developed following the decline of traditional manufacturing industries are more protracted than previously and result in young people pursuing activities during the ages of 16 to 19 years which enable them to shape their decisions about future careers. The importance of qualifications gained by young people during their school years is highly significant at this time as they not only affect their opportunities for employment but also have a bearing on the choice of course or training that they might wish to pursue in furtherance of their career prospects. The competition for jobs or for college courses and places on training schemes is very strong and, given that all the research indicates that between half and three-quarters of care leavers finish school with no qualifications, this group are severely disadvantaged in this contest (Biehal *et al.,* 1995).

Consequently, studies that have examined the experiences of care leavers have consistently found that they are over-represented amongst the unemployed and under-represented in further or higher education (Biehal *et al.,* 1992; Broad, 1998; Stein, 1990; Stein and Carey, 1986). Of the seventy-four young people in their follow-up sample, Biehal and her colleagues (1995) found at the first interview stage that only two had managed to find employment or continue in education. The vast majority, over two thirds, failed to find stable work or training on leaving school and were either unemployed or in casual work.

While direct entry from school to work has declined during the last quarter of the twentieth century, participation in full-time education has burgeoned. Scottish Executive statistics (2001) show that the proportion of young people leaving publicly funded schools that entered into full-time further or higher education has continued to rise from 40 per cent in the period 1992-1993 to 52 per cent during 2000-2001. This was made up of 32 per cent going on to full time higher education and a further 20 per cent taking up full time further education. The percentage of young people who left independent schools and continued onto full-time further or higher education was even greater at 91 per cent. By comparison it has been found that

fewer than twenty per cent of care leavers go on to further education and fewer than one per cent go to university (Biehal *et al.,* 1995; Scottish Executive 2002b). Conversely, an official government report (HMI/SWSI, 2001) found that between fifty and eighty per cent of young people leaving care are unemployed between the ages of 16 and 25.

Given the importance of educational qualifications as a key predictor in determining future careers and employment opportunities, young people in the care system require extra support to enable them to enter the labour market on a competitive footing. It might be expected therefore that carers would place a high premium on the value of education. There is, however, no evidence from outcome studies to suggest that this is the case. In fact, the opposite appears true. All of the research evidence to date (e.g. Biehal *et al.,* 1992; Dixon and Stein, 2002; Stein and Carey, 1986) has found that, whether they are placed for short or long periods, the level of educational attainment for young people leaving care is low and the young people have little interest in school. While these findings are true for looked after children generally, Biehal *et al.* (1992) also found evidence that young people leaving residential care may be at a particular disadvantage, with the young people in residential care in their sample having fewer qualifications than young people leaving foster care.

As we have seen then, studies that have examined the background circumstances of children who are placed in public care have consistently demonstrated that social disadvantage and economic deprivations are common characteristics among this group, resulting in a high degree of educational disadvantage prior to their care placement. Scrutiny of research that has addressed the outcomes for care leavers also shows that the educational progress of such children is not improved as a consequence of being looked after away from their natural families and an inordinately high proportion leave school with no qualifications. Therefore the in-care experience, it seems, does little to raise the educational performance of these young people. The next section examines a number of factors highlighted in the literature that may offer an insight into the circumstances that lie behind this situation.

In-Care Factors Affecting the Poor Educational Performance of Looked After Children

Placement Instability and Pre-Care Experiences

There are a number of views about why children in public care perform so poorly at school. For example, the instability of placements and frequency with which children are moved has often been cited as the most significant variable (Berridge and Cleaver, 1987; Biehal *et al.,* 1992; Millham *et al.,* 1986; Rowe and Lambert, 1973). Berridge (1985) vividly describes how a young girl in his study opened her wardrobe to show several school uniforms of schools that she had briefly attended during one year. Some recent research shows that care episodes now tend to be shorter than previously and that there is a strong likelihood that young people will consequently experience multiple placements (Berridge and Brodie, 1998; DOH, 1999; Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998). Some therefore argue that the instability arising from a lack of purposeful planning for children and appropriate nurturing within the care system are the really critical issues (Colton, 1988).

Biehal and colleagues (1992) found an association between disrupted care arrangements and poor educational attainment. Three-quarters of the young people in their study who had four or more placement moves had no qualifications when they left care compared to only half of those who had no moves. Bailey *et al* (2002) also report an association between placement stability and educational performance with average or above average performance more likely to occur in cases where there are fewer placement changes.

However, while this evidence suggests that disrupted care arrangements lead to poor educational progress, there have also been some indications that placement instability occurs as a *consequence* of difficulties with school arrangements rather than the other way around. In a study of 27 looked after young people (Francis *et al.,* 1996) it was found that eleven of the thirteen changes in care placements that also entailed changes of school were brought about either entirely or partially because of issues relating to the children's school circumstances. For this group of children it appeared

that education difficulties were more likely to contribute to a change of care placement than vice versa.

Other work has also questioned the significance of the stability factor. For instance, during the early stages of their study Aldgate *et al.* (1990) wrote that there seemed to be several variables at play including:

- The substantial effects of children's social backgrounds and the circumstances leading to care
- Lack of adequate attention by social workers and care staff to the educational needs of children in care coupled with the inadequacy of alternative school strategies for coping with behaviour problems and
- The in-care experiences of children, including the effects of separation and the compounding effects of multiple placement changes

At that point in their research, Aldgate and her colleagues commented that, in spite of the complexities, the strength of the relationship between educational attainment and permanence, deserved emphasis. In their view, it seemed that a sense of stability may have been an important facilitating factor in allowing children to make progress at school and they felt that the longer the stability existed the more it reinforced the chances of success (Aldgate *et al,* 1990).

However, though they did not initially feel that children's backgrounds influenced the outcome as much as the stability factor, they revised this position by the end of their investigation. In spite of their earlier optimism, the final results of their study forced the researchers to conclude that the quality and stability of the substitute family arrangements was not the most significant variable. They were disturbed and disappointed with the findings which showed that, despite being placed in long-term settled foster placements with foster parents who showed every indication of providing an environment conducive to educational progress, the foster children failed, in general, to demonstrate greater relative progress over the course of the study than the comparison group (Aldgate *et al.,* 1992).

In the final analysis they concluded that children's early histories before reception into care were very significant and they pointed to similarities in the findings for the comparison group of disadvantaged children who remained at home, to support the view that the principle reason for the poor educational progress of children in public care is that they are generally already educationally disadvantaged before they enter the care system.

Though, from the evidence arising in that particular study, the case regarding placement stability does not appear to be very strong, there is, as previously indicated, some evidence (Biehal *et al.,* 1992) that disruption and instability do have a detrimental effect on a child's educational performance. It may well be that the reason this factor has not emerged so strongly in the literature more generally is that investigators have frequently failed to distinguish between *stability* and *continuity*.

Jackson and Thomas (2001) argue that, where appropriate, disruptions and changes in care placements should be minimised. However, acknowledging that changes in care placements are often unavoidable for a variety of reasons, they stress that *continuity* is the key to supporting the young person and that continuity should be maintained in all other aspects of the young person's life including school arrangements and links with family and community. Martin and Jackson (2002) comment that stability in care arrangements is not sufficient in itself and that remaining in the same school when changes occur in placements is important in providing continuity and a safe haven in life.

Some evidence that continuity in the educational arrangements of the child is extremely important has emerged from a recent project in Bristol (2003). Set up to help raise the educational achievement of looked after children, additional teaching support was provided to a group of 30 children in mainstream primary schools. Despite moving foster placement during the course of the intervention and experiencing an initial phase of regression, two of the children improved their spelling and reading by 6 months – 1 year.

Stability and continuity are certainly important for young people who remain for short periods as well as long-term placements but it does not appear that this factor alone is sufficient to explain why the educational performance of children in public care is not improved when they are removed from their impoverished and difficult home backgrounds (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001).

Professional's Expectations

Another factor that has been highlighted in the research is the low expectations that social workers and carers may have concerning the educational achievement of looked after children. For example, in a study of social workers' decision-making Melotte (1979, cited in Jackson, 1989) looked at placement decisions in one local authority over a two-month period. He found that although twenty different factors were mentioned by at least one social worker, none included school or education. Another study, (Knapp, Bryson and Lewis, 1985) found that only 16 out of 285 objectives listed by social workers related to education and although half the children were assessed as having school-related difficulties, educational improvement was considered to be a specific objective for only six.

Other accounts of children who have been placed in public care indicate that they have experienced indifference from social workers and carers in relation to their education (Jackson, 1994; Kahan, 1979; Triseliotis and Russell, 1984; cited in Borland, 1998). Jackson (1994) found that where young people had been successful in their education, they reported that this was not due to support and encouragement from social workers. Harker *et al* (2003) report that few children in their study stated that social workers had supported their education. Foster carers were six times more likely to have supported the young people than social workers. Residential carers were less likely to have been as supportive as foster carers but were still more helpful than social workers.

Since the introduction of the Looking After Children materials, it has been found that social workers are reluctant to set educational standards for children, fearing that this might add to their sense of failure (Ward, 1995; cited in Borland, 1998). Gilligan

(1999) has expressed concern that social workers appear to have lost sight of the fact that, next to their families, schools have the strongest influence on children's development and he points out that the benefits of a good educational experience can be greatest for children who have experienced adverse circumstances in their home lives.

According to Jackson and Sachdev (2001) one symptom of the low level of expectations is that, despite most young people generally continuing their education beyond the age of 16, social workers and carers still tend to regard this as the age that education ceases for young people in public care. Moreover, the modest expectations that professionals have of these children is reinforced through the extremely low government targets which, in England and Wales aim to ensure that at least 50% of children leaving care at 16 or older have one GCSE or GNVQ qualification. The target set in Scotland is one standard grade in English and mathematics (Jackson and Sadchev, 2001). For many, these targets do not raise the levels of expectation sufficiently and there is concern that they will have little impact on the overall outcomes for young people leaving care.

Understanding the way that professionals' expectations affect the school performance of children in their care is not, however, simply a case of highlighting that social workers and carers do not expect these young people to be high achievers. Some research has shown that where social workers and carers do have higher levels of expectation, these are often not based on accurate knowledge of the child's educational performance or ability (Aldgate *et al.,* 1993) or they tend to reflect the view that, provided the child is attending school regularly, they should do well (Fletcher-Campbell and Hall, 1990).

Aldgate *et al* (1993) found that compared with teachers, social workers and carers held unduly optimistic expectations about the children's future attainment and thought that 63% would gain at least five GCSEs. In comparison with all the evidence relating to the educational outcomes for children leaving care, this finding

appears to indicate that the social workers were out of touch with the education of the children concerned (Borland *et al.,* 1998).

Others have commented that social workers views can be subjective and unreliable (Fletcher-Campbell and Hall, 1990) and that their opinions are not necessarily based on detailed knowledge of the school curriculum (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001). However, while some suggest that teachers are better placed to make reliable assessments of the children's prospects (Aldgate *et al.,* 1993; Fletcher-Campbell and Hall, 1990) others caution against assuming that 'teacher knows best' (Borland *et al.,* 1998; Jackson and Sadchev, 2001) and argue that lower expectations of teachers can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies and that a range of factors, other than the child's ability, can influence teachers' perceptions of their potential.

For example, the Bristol project (2003) referred to earlier, found that some class teachers had different assessments of learning needs than the specialist teacher who undertook the assessment of the group of looked after children on behalf of the project. Also, some head teachers were concerned that they had other children (not looked after) with greater need and would have preferred support to go to those children. In these cases, it was found that individual teachers' perceptions (and perhaps prejudices) played a part in the assessment process and that their expectations of the looked after children were low. Furthermore, there was little indication that the head teachers had a sense of 'corporate parenthood' in relation to the children in question.

Poor Educational Support

There is evidence that many residential care establishments do not provide an educationally rich environment for encouraging children and young people in their education and this may be another important factor relating to low levels of educational attainment among children in care. Berridge (1985) found that, while some homes are educationally stimulating, others are dull places in which to live and do little to encourage interest in the children's education. Returning to examine the quality of care in children's homes some 20 years after his earlier study he found that

adolescent units continued to provide a poor educational environment, with a lack of books and newspapers (Berridge and Brodie, 1998). As with other research (Blyth & Milner, 1997; Fletcher 1993; Stein, 1994) he also found that facilities for homework were sometimes unsatisfactory with limited privacy for study and staff did not make full use of opportunities to enhance children's education and to prompt wider discussion.

More recently, however, there are signs that government action is beginning to have an impact on the quality of educational support in children's homes. A study of the educational experience of 80 children and young people, aged 10-18 years, living in foster and residential care placements in England (Harker *et al.,* 2003) asked children to assess their current educational progress and identify individuals who supported or hindered their education, as well as the availability of educational support in care placements. Teaching staff were frequently mentioned as providers of support, whilst social workers were often associated with hindering educational progress. Children and young people had access to a range of educational supports in care placements, however there were variations between foster care and residential care and it was found that supports were more widely available in residential settings than in foster care. However, the researchers noted that most of these supports were material or physical whereas children in foster care had more personal support and interest from their carers.

Corporate Parenting

The failure of corporate parenting (that is the responsibility of the whole local authority to act as 'good parents' to children in public care) has also often been cited as a cause of the poor educational performance of looked after children. Implementation of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and subsequent adoption of the Looking After Children materials in most Scottish local authorities have marked an important stage in the development of the significance of corporate parenting. According to Jackson and Sachdev (2001) the Looking After Children (LAC) materials promote two aspects of the concept of corporate parenting. First, is the idea that local authorities have to have effective structures and procedures in place to

ensure that all professionals and agencies are working effectively together for the benefit of children in public care. Second, is the need to ensure that an individual has an overview of the progress of the child and takes a special interest in the child.

Hitherto, there has been widespread criticism of the failure of public authorities to ensure that adequate systems and procedures are in place to afford looked after children the same level of 'good parenting' as can be expected for children living with their own families. Such criticism emerged as long ago as the late 1970's (Parker, 1980) when a National Children's Bureau working party report highlighted the problems encountered by many children in the care system who, faced with a wide array of professionals and caregivers in their lives, had no particular individual with responsibility for promoting their development or quality of life - in all it's facets.

Similar criticism was levied against local authorities when the Department of Health established a working party in the late 1980's to look at ways of improving outcomes for children who were looked after away from home (Parker *et al.,* 1991). It was argued that parents in ordinary households were much more likely to be proactive in promoting their children's educational progress than local authorities were for children in public care.

The subsequent development of the Looking After Children Materials (discussed in more detail later in this chapter) was intended to give support to local authorities by providing a system that would ensure that all relevant departments of the authorities, together with other public bodies such as health and other relevant organisations, would work effectively together to promote the best interests of children in the care of the authority.

Similarly, the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (and the accompanying regulations and guidance) is based on a belief that parenting encompasses much more than day-to-day care and that it is necessary to have an overview of all aspects of a child's life, ensuring that appropriate plans are established for their future well-being (regulation

4, Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations, 1996) and that these are monitored and reviewed on a frequent basis (Section 31, C(S)A 1995).

Section 21 of the 1995 Act places a legal duty on local authorities and other relevant agencies and individuals to collaborate in the planning and delivery of services to looked after children. Sections 19 and 20 of the Act require local authorities to prepare, consult upon, review and publish children's services plans showing how they intend to provide those services to children. Indeed, locating the care of looked after children within the whole authority rather than just the social work department gives a clear message about the importance of the 'corporate' responsibility towards this group of children (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001).

That there are problems related to the corporate parenting of children in public care is now widely recognised, however, and research (e.g. Biehal *et al.,*1995; Dixon and Stein, 2002; Jackson and Martin, 1998; Utting 1991, 1997; Ward and Skuse, 1999) has consistently demonstrated that poor outcomes result from corporate parenting, leading some to conclude that, by definition, such parenting is therefore inferior parenting (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001). Launching the 'Quality Protects' programme in England and Wales (DOH, 1998a), the government acknowledged that there have been deficiencies in the care system that have led to poor outcomes and diminished life chances for children leaving care.

Nowhere have such corporate parenting deficiencies been more prominent than among the educational outcomes of young people leaving the care system. The importance of parental involvement in the education of children has long been established (Plowden Report, 1967; Quinton *et al.,* 1997) and it is clear that having parents who are interested in and informed about their children's educational progress brings considerable advantage to them. One of the major difficulties associated with corporate parenting, however, is that the degree of personal interest taken in a child's education does not match that which effective parents offer.

A study which sought to examine perceptions of the corporate parenting role and the expectations of social workers, carers and teachers in relation to children's educational performance (Francis *et al.,* 1996) confirmed the findings of earlier research conducted in England (Aldgate *et al.,* 1993). Asked to rank a number of areas of their work, both social workers and carers rated 'helping children to maintain links with their birth families' as their top priority while 'attending to children's educational attainment' was not viewed as a top priority of any of the social workers or carers. In fact this was next to bottom on the social worker's lists.

Though more than two-thirds of the children in the study were experiencing school related problems and, in many instances, these had contributed to the decision to place the child in care, neither social workers nor carers rated discussion of the child's educational progress as a high priority during social worker visits. While social workers and carers accepted the principle of corporate parenting, it was difficult to see how, in practice, the corporate role was devolved to any one individual to monitor and chase the child's educational progress (Francis *et al.,*).

Where local authorities do adopt a more structured approach to their corporate parenting responsibilities relating to the educational arrangements for looked after children, including effective liaison between education and social work, there is some evidence of higher commitment to children's educational success and children are more likely to be maintained in school (Fletcher-Campbell, 1997; Vernon and Sinclair, 1998). However, it is clear that this is an area where there is still much scope for improved practice. In many local authorities, services to children are now organised under one department (often under the direction of the education department) and, at the time of writing, the study authority is undertaking a consultation exercise on plans to move to a single 'children's services' department. Though there is (inevitably) a degree of resistance to such major structural change, it may be that such new arrangements will prove more effective in delivering better educational arrangements for children in the authority's care.

Communication and Co-ordination

Notwithstanding recent developments, examples of effective corporate arrangements are not greatly in evidence in the literature and poor communication and lack of coordination within and between the two key services, social work and education, have frequently been cited as factors that characterise corporate parenting. Such characteristics invariably lead to poor educational performance on the part of children in public care.

Communication and coordination problems arise within a number of levels of the system, including the actions and responsibilities of front line service providers and, more generally, within organisational policies and procedures. Borland *et al* (1998) refer to these concerns and also associate the problems of corporate parenting with additional factors, such as the lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities between carers, social workers and teachers or about maintaining effective contact with the schools. An SSI/Ofsted report (1995) noted that none of the local authorities inspected had issued clear guidance on what the role of carers should be in relation to children's education but that, nonetheless, there was a heavy reliance on carers to promote the children's educational interests. Social workers were not actively involved with schools nor did they have a keen interest in the children's education. Similar findings arise elsewhere in the literature (e.g. Aldgate *et al.,* 1993; Francis *et al.,* 1996; HMI/SWSI, 2001), demonstrating that, by and large, carers, rather than field social workers, take on the key role of liaising with schools though there is usually no officially agreed policy or procedure in relation to this.

A recent report on a sample of 50 looked after children in 5 local authorities in Scotland (HMI/SWSI, 2001), found that relationships between school staff and carers were generally positive (though some residential units were commented on less favourably) and that schools often treated carers as if they were parents for all school-related purposes. By contrast, even though it was felt that partnerships had improved in recent years, relationships between schools and social workers were of mixed quality and, as with previous research (Aldgate *et al.,* 1993; Francis *et al.,* 1996) generally, social workers were not knowledgeable about the attainment levels

of their children and did not have a good understanding of the education curriculum or qualifications system.

Though social workers have indicated that they value the role that carers take in maintaining links with schools, and state that they often delegate this role to them, such delegation is not always stated explicitly and can lead to a number of difficulties. For example, in many cases carers may require additional support to undertake this work effectively (HMI/SWSI, 2001). Furthermore, while the involvement of carers in the educational aspects of a child's care is generally seen as a positive feature, there can also often be problems and confusion in relation to the roles and responsibilities of birth parents. The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 requires local authorities to consult with parents and to take their views into account in relation to decisions that affect their child (section 17). However, there is little evidence that parents are encouraged to maintain an active role concerning the schooling of their child (SSI/Ofsted, 1995) and frequently there is confusion about where parents retain legal rights and responsibilities in relation to their children. Consequently, parents do not always receive copies of school reports (HMI/SWSI, 2001), leaving them in a difficult position to provide appropriate support and encouragement.

There is also some evidence that staff in residential units do not adequately fill the role of absent parents. Teachers have described residential staff as behaving in similar ways to uninterested parents, for example, by not attending parents' evenings, sports days or school functions and failing to inform the school when children were sick (Berridge and Brodie, 1996, cited in Borland *et al.,* 1998). For their part, residential staff feel they lack the necessary information and authority to negotiate effectively with schools and are usually only involved when there are problems rather than routinely (ibid).

Even in those circumstances where carers take a positive, active role in promoting the educational progress of children in their care, the outcomes do not appear to be favourable. In their study of the education of children in long-term foster care,

Aldgate *et al.* (1993) found that despite taking a personal interest in the children and maintaining regular contact with the school, carers were unable to overcome the educational deficits that the children brought to the care placement. This led the researchers to conclude that social workers may need to be more pro-active in linking with schools to identify what additional input might be required. Similarly, while Fletcher-Campbell (1990) and Quinton *et al* (1997) found that foster carers played a positive role in educational matters, they did not always have the necessary support and back up from social workers when they encountered particular difficulties.

All of the evidence examined suggests that there is an implicit assumption on the part of social workers that the day-to-day responsibility for monitoring the educational progress of children in care rests with the carers. For their part, foster carers seem to undertake this role more fully than their residential counterparts but even then there are general problems associated with a lack of:

a) clear role definition and boundaries,
b) effective methods of information exchange, and
c) explicit procedures for addressing particular difficulties or needs.

At the wider organisational level, the literature suggests that there are communication failures relating to the education and social work recording systems and that these problems have not been overcome through the introduction of computer technology (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001). It has been reported that, besides often having little or no recorded details of children's care and education experiences within their own systems (Francis *et al.,* 1996), both education authorities and social work services frequently have no means of recording important information that crosses-over the two domains (Evans, 2000). Thus schools are often unaware of when pupils become looked after or change care placements and social workers regularly have no record of the schools that children attend or their levels of attainment.

Additionally, social workers and teachers often lack knowledge of each other's structures and particular language. Social worker's have no training about schools, the education curriculum or the education system more generally. Similarly, teachers may have little or no knowledge of the care system and may not always be clear about the reasons why children become looked after (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001).

Commentators are in broad agreement that the only way that effective corporate parenting and improved communication can be achieved is through greater collaboration between education and social services (Fletcher, 1997). In fact, it has been suggested that increasing financial resources is less likely to be effective than ensuring that there is increased awareness and commitment to joint action by a range of adults that the young people come into contact with (Fletcher-Campbell, 1997).

The arguments calling for better corporate parenting and improved co-ordination and communication between the relevant agencies and professionals are resonant with the views of those responsible for developing and implementing the Looking After Children Materials. Writing about the implementation process of the materials in Scotland, Wheelaghan *et al.* (1999) claim that effective operation of the LAC materials depends largely on its forms and practices becoming well integrated into work within the social work departments and in conjunction with other agencies.

Moreover, Jackson (1987, 1994) contends that while better collaborative working is important it should also be recognised that children in public care are uniquely vulnerable to falling through the gaps between services and that it is therefore necessary for the local authority as a whole to accept special responsibility for these children and to exercise positive discrimination on their behalf in relation to their education.

School Exclusion

The call for local authorities to exercise positive discrimination on behalf of looked after children would be particularly effective in relation to the issue of school

exclusion because it is apparent that exclusion from school is a highly significant issue for children in public care. Research findings show that children who are looked after by local authorities are frequently the most vulnerable to exclusion of all children in schools and they are significantly over-represented in exclusion figures (Brodie, 2001; Lindsay, 1997; SSI/OFSTED, 1995). A recent report by the Social Exclusion Unit (1998a), for example, found that young people in care are ten times more likely to be excluded from school than their peers. Similarly, since the Scottish Executive Education Department first started collecting statistics in 1998, the figures for each school year have consistently shown that, by comparison with the overall school population, pupils looked after by the local authority have higher exclusion rates than other pupils.

A survey of children's homes in Scotland found that one-third had children excluded from school "most of the time" and nearly a half "occasionally" (Lindsay, 1997). Eleven of the seventeen cases in a recent study of children in six residential homes in two English authorities (Brodie, 2001) had a history of school exclusion and this was an ongoing problem after they were placed in care.

Similarly, Berridge & Brodie (1998) found that exclusion is often viewed as an inevitable part of life in most children's homes and that little action seems to be taken to counteract the problem. They also found that residential staff were often unclear about whether children were excluded from school or were not attending for other reasons. An Audit Commission report (1994) found that just over one-third of looked after children were not attending school and a survey of children in Strathclyde children's homes found that one in five were not registered at any school, employment or college and almost two-fifths were absent from school (Lockhart et al, 1996 cited in Borland et al, 1998). A current investigation into the views of 80 young people in public care has found that 43% had been excluded from school at some stage and most of these had experienced exclusion while they were being looked after by the local authority (Harker et al., 2003).

The relationship between school exclusion and wider social exclusion

Clearly, when children are excluded from school they are not likely to make good progress with their studies and this will have a damaging effect on their levels of attainment. The implications of this are particularly serious for the longer term since the literature suggests that permanent exclusion from school is associated with wider social exclusion from society and particularly so for girls (Hayton 1999).

Permanent exclusion is often associated with long periods without education (Audit Commission, 1999b; CRE, 1996; DFE, 1995b;), under-attainment and reduced employment opportunities (SEU, 1998b), isolation and inaccessibility to social resources (Hayton, 1999; Parffrey, 1994) and the involvement of social services (Berridge *et al.,* 2001).

One particular reason that social services tend to become involved with young people who have been excluded from school is because of their subsequent involvement in minor offending. For those who are already in the care system this represents a worrying issue as some research suggests there is a causal link between school exclusion and entry into crime and there appears to be a well-established overlap between school exclusion and youth offending (Devlin, 1996; Audit Commission, 1996, 1999; Rutter, Giller and Hagell, 1998; Osler (ed) 2000; Parsons 1999; SEU, 1998a; Vulliamy and Webb 2000).

The Audit Commission (1996) found that 42% of offenders of school age who were sentenced in the youth courts had been excluded from school. Interestingly, there appears to be a strong parallel between these figures and those for young offenders who have been in the care system. A recent Scottish Executive report (2002) shows that 45% of young offenders held in custody in 2000 had been in residential care at some time.

Of course, for many, the act of permanent exclusion may exacerbate the tendency to offend and clearly wider socio-cultural phenomena are also involved. For example, Berridge *et al.* (2001) cite a few instances which show that where social capital is

increased (e.g. supportive family or neighbourhood networks), the young people break away from offending. Unfortunately, such support systems are not always readily available to children in care, thus their propensity to engage in offending may be increased.

A point of some concern is that while offending behaviour seems to be a feature that has been identified in a high proportion of the outcomes for young people leaving the care system, the data reported later in this study, as elsewhere (e.g. Brodie, 2001), do not indicate that the majority of young people enter the care system with an established history of offending. This suggests that their offending may indeed be related to their experience of school exclusion and that failures in the care system to maintain young people in school may lead to them engaging in criminal activities. Such outcomes have obvious potential consequences for their adult lives and this is an area that would clearly benefit from further study.

Besides the apparent link between school exclusion and subsequent offending behaviour, links have been established between school exclusion and other aspects of wider social exclusion. In a retrospective study (Berridge *et al.,* 2001) of 343 young people who had been excluded from school between 1988 and 1998 the investigators found that, as with the young people reported later in this study, their sample was characterised by social disadvantage and family difficulties. Furthermore, they often had special educational needs and histories of truancy. After exclusion, where employment was achieved, it tended to be low-paid and insecure. From their qualitative interviews with 28 people Berridge *et al.* (2001) noted that:

> 'Permanent exclusion tended to trigger a complex chain of events which served to loosen the young person's affiliation and commitment to a conventional chain of life. This important transition was characterised by: the loss of time structures; a re-casting of identity; a changed relationship with parents and siblings; the erosion of contact with pro-social peers and adults; closer association with similarly situated young people and heightened vulnerability to police surveillance' (p.vi)

Reasons for Exclusions

The reasons given for exclusion vary greatly, from relatively minor incidents to serious criminal offences. The most common recorded reason for a permanent exclusion from school is physical or verbal abuse, followed by disruption and other misconduct (Hayden and Dunne, 2001; OFSTED, 1996; SEU, 1998). Of all exclusions with known circumstances in Scotland during the school year 2001/2002, the majority relate to behavioural problems - 24 per cent were for general or persistent disobedience; 17 per cent involved verbal abuse of members of staff; and 13 per cent involved physical abuse of fellow pupils (Scottish Executive, 2003d). While the broad public perception is that most exclusions result from 'violent' behaviour, this is not in fact the case.

Studies that have explored the views of teachers about 'troublesome' behaviour (Wheldall and Merrett, 1984) found that 'talking out of turn' and 'hindering other children' were viewed as most problematic and boys were considered to be more disruptive than girls. Evidence suggests that exclusions are often the result of an accumulation of these problems within the classroom.

Children in residential care make up a relatively small proportion of the total population of children that are looked after by public authorities, yet they are among the most damaged children in society (DOH, 1998b). The circumstances and factors leading to school exclusion, such as troublesome, abusive or disruptive behaviour, are frequently the characteristics of children in residential care settings. Moreover, boys make up the largest proportion of children in residential care and the statistics show that boys are significantly more likely to be excluded from school than girls. Taken together, these factors begin to suggest one explanation for the high rate of exclusion among this group of young people. However, while it is apparent that an inordinately high proportion of young people in public care experience exclusion from school, clearly this is not so for all. For the purposes of this study, understanding why some young people appear less vulnerable to such problems than others, despite facing similar adversity, is therefore an important consideration in addressing concerns about poor educational outcomes.

Resilience Theory

One field of enquiry that appears increasingly relevant to the study of the educational performance of young people in public care is resilience theory. The study of resilience has been more fully developed in the field of psychology than elsewhere in the social sciences but recently it has become increasingly widely discussed in the context of education and social work (Newman and Blackburn, 2002). Research suggests that there is no single source of resilience or vulnerability but that many interacting factors come into play (National Advisory Mental Health Council, 1995). These factors include not only individual genetic predispositions, which express themselves in enduring aspects of temperament, personality, and intelligence, but also qualities such as social skills and self-esteem. These qualities, shaped by a variety of environmental influences including early experience and bonding with parents or other caregivers, form expectations in childhood that shape later social experiences. This process of social learning often influences behaviour and self-esteem and advances in behavioural science research are revealing sources of vulnerability and strength in several areas of investigation.

Research on 'resilient' children is now focusing on ways to foster and strengthen those personality traits that help children to grow up to be psychologically well adjusted, even after severe trauma. Increased research into the conceptual and practice aspects of resilience has resulted in a burgeoning literature on the theory of resilience and has amplified knowledge about the protective factors that support positive outcomes, particularly for children in adverse circumstances such as children cared for away from home (Rutter, 1985; Werner, 1990; Werner and Smith, 1992; cited in, Daniel and Wassell, 2002).

The protective factors that have been identified in the literature appear to be associated with long-term social and emotional well-being in adulthood and have been located at three different levels within an ecological framework, namely, 'The Individual'; 'Family Relationships' and 'The Wider Community' (Daniel and Wassell, 2002).

What is Resilience?

At its most basic level, resilience can be understood as 'Normal development under difficult circumstances' (Fonagy *et al*, 1994). However, the literature abounds with alternative and more detailed definitions. Fraser, Richman and Galinsky (1999) suggest that three characteristics are central to the term resilience. These are:

- Overcoming the odds – being successful despite exposure to high risk
- Sustaining competence under pressure – adapting to high risk
- Recovering from trauma – adjusting successfully to negative events

In their recent review of international literature Newman and Blackburn (2002) found that the term resilience did not always have a single counterpart in other languages. However, the concept appeared to be understood cross-culturally and was usually defined in ways that highlighted the capacity to 'resist' or 'bounce back' from adversities. This led them to develop the following formulation of resilience:

> "Resilient children are better equipped to resist stress and adversity, cope with change and uncertainty, and to recover faster and more completely from traumatic events or episodes."

Other commentators have also stressed the 'coping skills' that are evident amongst resilient children. Masten and Coatsworth (1998), for example, state that a resilient child is one who exhibits positive adaptation in circumstances of atypical levels of stress where one might expect a significant degradation in coping skills to take place.

While most definitions highlight the significance of individual attributes, others (Fraser, Richman and Galinsky, 1999) remind us that resilience emerges in a 'supportive context'. Being aware of the inter-connectedness of individual and environmental factors is particularly important when working with young people in residential care since different props and supports may promote and sustain resilience in different sets of circumstances (Gilligan, 2001).

Individual resilience is related to intrinsic qualities including gender, temperament and disposition and it is suggested that some children are more intrinsically resilient than others with their level of resilience falling along a dimension of vulnerability and resilience, as shown in Figure 1 (from Daniel and Wassell, 2002, p.11).

Figure 1: Dimension on which individual resilience can be located

At the levels of family and wider community, protective factors might include the existence of a close attachment or the presence of a supportive extended family network. Resilience at these levels is located along a dimension of adverse and protective extrinsic factors in the environment, as shown in Figure 2 (from Daniel and Wassell, 2002, p.11).

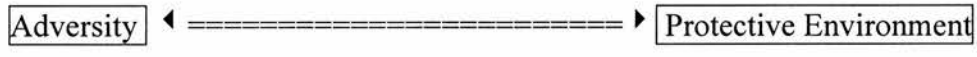


Figure 2: Dimension on which factors of resilience around the child can be located

It is argued that the two dimensions represented above interact and that increases in protective factors on each level will promote a child's resilience. Additionally, it is thought that three fundamental building blocks underpin the factors associated with resilience (Gilligan, 1997):

1. A secure base, whereby the child feels a sense of belonging and security
2. Good self-esteem, that is, an internal sense of worth and competence
3. A sense of self-efficacy, that is, a sense of mastery and control, along with an accurate understanding of personal strengths and limitations

Rutter (1995) suggests that encouraging positive development experiences for children is not just a question of promoting resilience and eliminating risk factors, since learning to *manage* risk factors is itself a powerful way for a child to develop resilience. It is important therefore, that children and young people do not become over-protected from challenging opportunities since this might be counter-productive to their well-being.

Newman and Blackburn (2002) found evidence in the literature that children have become less able to cope with and overcome stressors or obstacles because of being over-sheltered (Mental Health Foundation, 1999). They also found that trends in social care services have tended to emphasise risk factors rather than promote opportunities for growth and adaptation (Early and GlenMaye, 2000). The development of resilience theory as a basis for work with children in the care system therefore offers an opportunity to shift the focus onto the strengths and positives in a young person's personal and social context. It is suggested that while risk factors derive mainly from chronic adverse events, resilience is promoted through enabling a young person to interact with his or her environment in a way that reduces helplessness and promotes control. This process entails an approach that aims not only to minimise the potentially harmful effects of the risks that confront young people in the care system, but also to provide them with appropriate stimulation, challenge and opportunity.

Resilience and Secure Base

The concept of a secure base relates to the physical and emotional ties that support and sustain young people in their growth and development and which helps them to cope with stressful experiences (Gilligan, 2001). The relationship between resilience and a secure base is linked to the importance of attachments in early and later childhood (Ainsworth *et al*, 1978). Some of the most fruitful explorations of the close personal relationships that moderate vulnerability and resilience involve studies of attachment, the special bond between infants and their caregivers (National Advisory Mental Health Council, 1995). Children and young people who have secure attachments have a stable base from which they can begin to engage with the wider

social world and so long-term resilience is associated with the opportunity to develop a secure attachment to at least one care-giver (Daniel and Wassell, 2002).

Children classified as securely attached to a caregiver during infancy will later approach problem-solving tasks more positively and with greater persistence than will children who are insecurely attached. Children with secure attachments also are likely to be more empathic, compliant, unconflicted, and generally competent in their relationships with adults and peers. Children with insecure attachments tend to have trouble relating to other people because their behaviour is often either hostile and distant or overly dependent. These tendencies may extend into adolescence and adulthood, influencing significant social relationships as well as basic attitudes toward life (National Advisory Mental Health Council, 1995).

It is important to remember, however, that even where young people have not had good attachment experiences in early childhood, at different stages of their development relationships with other significant people may afford a level of stability and security that promotes good attachment experiences. The potential benefits of stability and continuity, which are associated with secure attachments, are therefore particularly important in work with looked after young people (Jackson and Thomas, 1999).

Research suggests that the protective qualities of a secure base tend to occur regardless of ethnic, cultural or socio-economic background. For example, in a long-term longitudinal study of Hawaiian children (Werner and Smith, 1992 cited in, Newman and Blackburn, 2002), it was found that strong bonds between child and primary carer in the early years of life were particularly important as were giving children encouragement to be robust and socially active.

Similarly, studies that have examined the experiences of children from disadvantaged family backgrounds have found that the quality of the relationship between caregiver and child is one of the most significant factors associated with an increased or decreased likelihood of the child becoming resilient (Osborn, 1990; Pilling, 1990).

These studies showed that the children most likely to develop competence came from families where the parents were supportive, non-authoritarian, child-centred and held positive attitudes towards their children's educational progress. Indeed, Osborn (1990) found that having a positive attitude towards the child's education was the most significant factor in promoting children's resilience and outweighed the effects of all other variables.

Another important factor related to the presence or absence of protective factors in a child's family base is the role of the father. In circumstances where children come from two parent households, where the father is in employment and where he takes an active role in encouraging the child's educational pursuits, the child has a greater chance of developing resilient qualities (Pilling, 1990).

Gilligan (2001) reminds us, however, that the picture for children in the public care system does not resemble the type of families described above. Such protective factors as supportive, non-authoritarian, child-centred parents or two parent households, are frequently absent from the looked after child's circumstances. Similarly, as previously discussed, children in the care system tend to come from the most disadvantaged and socially excluded families.

It is recognised that there is a tendency for risk factors to be inter-connected so that the cumulative effect of such problems as low socio-economic status, living in a deprived area, in single parent households, with poor family supports and high degrees of social isolation, all combine in a manner that make it difficult, if not impossible, for families to provide resilience-promoting circumstances for their children. As will be shown later, these features are in ample evidence in the lives and circumstances of the young people in this study and their families.

While it has been found that resilience can be promoted in later life, even after periods where the child has had difficulty coping with stressful circumstances or events, the likelihood of overcoming earlier adversities is diminished in those circumstances where children have been faced with continuous and severe

difficulties without the benefits of protective factors. Research has shown that while children may be able to cope with moderate adversity, their ability to sustain positive development rapidly diminishes when they are confronted with cumulative risks (Fergusson and Lynskey, 1996). This is especially so when the factors that render children vulnerable occur during sensitive developmental stages or periods of transition (Rutter, 1985).

However, an important protective factor for children who have experienced multiple adversities is the ability to focus on the benefits that may have resulted from confronting difficulties and using this as a basis for promoting growth. Developing an approach which recognises that adversities can be overcome remains vital in work with children in residential care. For example, giving young people the opportunity to reflect upon attachment experiences is crucial in helping them to overcome difficult or disturbing earlier experiences (Fonagy *et al*, 1994). Allowing them to understand the impact of extrinsic factors, such as poverty, social isolation and fractured relationships, on their parents' capacity to provide them with a secure base is also important. While the primary objective remains the rehabilitation of young people with their families, such opportunities for reflection and growth enable young people to adapt their attachment behaviour and establish new and more secure relationships. Thus the role of carers and staff in work with looked after children can help to promote either better relationships in the family or, where it is unlikely that children will return home, a secure base within the care environment.

Resilience and Education Experiences

A number of studies have found that educational *under-achievement* is associated with a range of psycho-socio-criminal pathology and that this is most marked in those who have been excluded from school (Farrington, 1995; Rutter and Smith, 1995).

Conversely, Rutter (1991) describes *positive educational attainment* as a 'critical characteristic' associated with the protective factors found in resilient children and it has been found that positive school experiences seem to be connected to a later

capacity to approach decisions about work and marriage on a planned basis (Quinton and Rutter, 1988). Absence of the resilience factors that can be derived from positive educational experiences therefore has potentially significant harmful implications in the spheres of relationships and employment.

In fact, it has been found that educational progress is an extremely important determinant of future employment prospects. Not surprisingly, qualification levels are linked to successful or unsuccessful transitions from school to employment. A recent study (McVicar and Anyadike-Danes, 2002) found that achievement of five or more GCEs at grades A-C was seen to have the most positive effect on the likelihood of a transition to further or higher education whereas failure to obtain such qualifications increased the likelihood of a jobless-dominated transition. Furthermore, as ex-care leavers with few or no educational qualifications grow older, their chances of being employed grow progressively slimmer (Cheung and Heath, 1994).

The protective aspects of good educational experiences have also been seen to be beneficial in adulthood for those looked after young people who have experienced abuse. In a long-term follow-up study of women who had been sexually abused as children, Romans *et al* (1995) found that positive school experiences (academic, sporting or extra-curricular) helped to distinguish those who had done better in terms of recovery.

In a study of the experiences of thirty-eight 'high achieving' ex-care leavers, Jackson (1998) found that educational success was a crucial factor in determining adult life-styles and ensuring social inclusion. She concluded that, rather than being a subsidiary consideration in care planning and decisions, education should be regarded as a top priority.

The importance of encouraging social workers, carers and families to regard education as a central resilience-promoting factor is crucial to improving the long-term outcomes for looked after children. Education is described as one of six key

domains of resilience, the others being a secure base; friendships; talents and interests; positive values; and social competence (Daniel and Wassell, 2002). Schools and schooling are particularly important in the lives of children and young people because, besides providing a formal learning environment, schools offer many opportunities for children to develop resilience through constructive contact with peers and adults that help them to develop self-esteem and efficacy.

Howe *et al* (1999) comment that school life, with its rich environment of new relationships and tasks, presents children with occasions to identify, develop and establish fresh, more robust and socially valued aspects of the self. Schools can also act as a secure base for children who may experience insecure attachments in their home situation (Garbarino *et al*, 1992; Gilligan, 1998, cited in Daniel and Wassell, 2002) thus providing an environment that counterbalances some of the deficits that may occur in other realms of a child's life.

The issue of resilience in relation to the education of looked after children is a complex one. Successful educational attainment is regarded as one of the key elements in promoting resilience in children and also one of the significant determinants of adult lifestyles. As discussed earlier, there is clearly a need to identify and promote factors that will help to minimise the incidence of school exclusion in this group and thereby reduce the long-term harmful effects on their life opportunities.

Differential experiences in relation to school exclusion may be due in large part to the socio-economic and wider environmental factors that shape and form children's experiences but it is also important to be aware of how these factors may impact differently on individual children. Knowledge of the risk and protective factors that may have a bearing on the quality of children's educational experience is developing and much has been made of the need to help pupils with multiple risk factors unrelated to school, such as looked after children (Clarke and Clarke, 2000; Hayden and Dunne, 2001; Jackson and Martin, 1998;).

Protective factors that are tentatively linked with reducing the risk of school exclusion, include:

- Access to supportive social networks (Hayton, 1999);
- Learning to read at an early age (Jackson and Martin, 1998);
- 'Resilience' nurtured by a network of affectionate relationships (Clarke and Clarke, 2000, MHF, 1999);
- Having a pro-social peer group (Clarke *et al.*, 2000);
- Developing an internal locus of control (Hayden, 2002; Jackson and Martin, 1998;).

Transitional episodes or events, such as changing schools, being bullied or entering and leaving the care system, represent particular periods of heightened risk in children. Studies in Britain and the United States have highlighted, for example, the decline in academic performance of vulnerable children on transfer from primary school to secondary school (e.g. Jackson and Sachdev, 2001; National Advisory Mental Health Council, 1995). National statistics show that levels of non-attendance and exclusion increase substantially after pupils transfer from primary to secondary schools. One of the key factors appears to be the sense of dislocation experienced by some pupils as they move from having a single key class teacher in primary school to having many different teachers within the much more complex organisation of a secondary school (HMI, 2001). Evidence obtained in another recent study (Brodie, 2001) suggests that the move between residential setting and home can also prove destabilising for a young person if the levels of intensive support with schooling that some carers offer is not duplicated by the parents on the young person's return home.

A 'resilient child', that is, one who makes favourable progress in unfavourable circumstances, may continue to do well despite the abusive or disadvantaged circumstances he or she experiences in their home life and despite also the pressures of being cared for away from home. Understanding how to promote resilience may

therefore help to develop practice with young people in residential or foster care and increase the possibility of improved outcomes in different dimensions of their lives, including their educational outcomes. Indeed, since resilience is linked to better long-term outcomes because it enables children to overcome adversity, it is argued that developing resilience should be regarded as the key objective when planning for looked after children (Gilligan, 1997, Daniel and Wassell, 2002)

Risk Factors and Protective Factors

Risk factors increase the likelihood that children will experience poor outcomes while protective factors heighten the probability that they will resist or recover from exposure to adversities. Generally, as described above, the risk and protective factors associated with resilience theory are addressed within an ecological framework which incorporates three levels (see Emery and Forehand, 1994; Palmer, 1997; Gilligan, 1997; Daniel and Wassell, 2002). These levels are:

- The individual child
- Family relationships and
- The wider community

Risk and protective factors operate both within and across each of these three levels and increases in protective factors in one level may have a positive impact on risk factors in another level. In adopting a resilience based approach in their practice, it is important that social workers, carers and other professionals develop specific methods and frameworks to assist them to assess and intervene effectively in young people's lives. Daniel and Wassell (2002) refer to a useful checklist, used by the International Resilience Project, to identify resilience in a child (Grotberg, 1997, p.20). This includes;

- The child has someone who loves him/her unconditionally

- The child has an older person outside the home he/she can tell about problems
- The child is praised for doing things on his/her own
- The child can count on her/his family to be there when needed
- The child knows someone he/she wants to be like
- The child believes things will turn out all right
- The child does endearing things that make people like him/her
- The child believes in power greater than seen
- The child is willing to try new things
- The child likes to achieve in what he/she does
- The child feels that what she/he does makes a difference in how things come out
- The child likes himself/herself
- The child can focus on a task and stay with it
- The child has a sense of humour
- The child makes plans to do things

Though this checklist serves to highlight aspects of a child's wider circumstances or personal characteristics that suggest the presence or absence of resilience factors, the findings examined later in this study indicate that the value of this tool is limited since it does little to help organise this information for the purposes of assessment, planning and intervention. A more systematic method can be found in the three dimensions of the ecological model, which serves as a useful framework for delineating and organising risk and protective factors.

Table 1

Risk Factors

The Child	*The Family*	*The Environment*
Learning disability	High level of parental conflict	Poverty and low social capital
Genetic factors	Parental separation	Homelessness or fragile housing
Developmental delay	Lack of consistent guidance	Racism
Difficult temperament	Parent-child hostility	Unpredictable and unmanageable crises
Problems with communication	Abuse	
Chronic illness	Parental psychological disorder	
Poor educational performance	Parental alcoholism or drug dependency	
Low self-esteem	Parental criminality	
	Poor friendship networks	

(from Pearce and Holmes 1994 cited in Newman and Blackburn, 2002)

Among others, Newman and Blackburn (2002) have adopted this model to discuss the conceptual and theoretical basis of resilience (see Table 1) and to outline the range of risks that may occur at the level of the child, the family and the environment. The factors listed are those that increase the likelihood of a child failing to develop the attributes associated with resilience and the table provides a very useful structure for gathering and assessing information concerning a child's circumstances. The framework has certainly proved a useful analytical tool for discussing the data described later in this research.

In considering the way that education acts to promote protective factors in the personal and social development of young people in the care system, and thus develop their resilience, Gilligan (2001, p.30) provides a useful summary of the many positive functions that schools and education can serve. Schools may:

- Be a source of friendships and peer relationships

- Serve as an asylum from other painful arenas in the young person's life
- Offer meaningful roles as student in the classroom or in extra-curricular activities
- Provide opportunities for supportive or mentoring relationships with concerned teachers or other school staff
- Help develop social skills
- Build self-esteem and self-efficacy
- Offer a gateway to the world of work
- Help establish life-long interests and hobbies
- Offer an alternative source of counselling and support with personal problems
- Provide 'turning point' experiences for the young person as they develop

The pivotal role of education in the positive development of children and in their successful integration into society is therefore well documented and persistent failure in this area usually has a severely debilitating effect. The lost opportunity of developing their full potential that many looked after young people experience in the context of home, school and society can result in a collapse of confidence, withdrawal from the struggle towards worthwhile achievement, a greater tendency to revolt against society and a greater incidence of psychosocial problems (Varma, 1993).

In recent times children generally appear to have been subjected to higher levels of stress and risk factors and there is widespread consensus that the last fifty years has witnessed a substantial increase in psychological and conduct disorders (Rutter and Smith, 1995). There appears to be an increase in the incidence of serious problems such as behavioural difficulties, eating disorders, self-injury and para-suicides and suicide itself. Additionally, truancy, school avoidance and exclusion figures are causing increasing concern among politicians and professionals. Many of the latter

problems are particularly characteristic of the needs and issues affecting young people in this study and in residential care more generally. The promotion of resilience, through placing greater emphasis on factors that promote well-being rather than on risk factors, may be an important strategy in reversing this trend (Rayner and Montague, 2000).

The relationship between, personal and educational success, self-esteem, mutual respect and social quality is becoming more widely recognised as is the role of education in maximising stimulation and opportunity for every child in each of these domains (Varma, 1993). There is, therefore, increasing agreement among a number of commentators that the growing study of resilience theory is most useful in reaching a better understanding of the positive and negative outcomes of looked after children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Fraser, 1997).

Promoting Better Outcomes for Looked After Children – A Resilience Approach

Adverse risk for children, like those discussed later in the lives of the young people in this study, is primarily associated with significant levels of family discord and disruption (Rutter and Quinton, 1984). Where children display persistent conduct and psychological disorders into adulthood they are likely to have been exposed to continually adverse circumstances throughout their childhood and not just periodic episodes of difficulty (Quinton *et al*, 1990). However, while the risk of long-term disorder is heightened by chronic adversity, the development of resilience can be promoted by minimising the degree of risk in a child's environment. Furthermore, the extent to which a child is enabled to interact with their environment in a way that reduces helplessness and promotes control is also an important factor (Newman and Blackburn, 2002). It is also suggested that having positive expectations about children's abilities is particularly important in promoting resilience and that confidence, competence and self esteem go together in those environments where the young person is encouraged to grow and develop, rather than in circumstances where they are over-protected.

Table 2

Resilience Factors

The Child	*The Family*	*The Environment*
Temperament (active, good-natured)	Warm supportive parents	Supportive extended family
Female prior to and male during adolescence	Good parent-child relationships	Successful school experiences
Age (being younger)	Parental harmony	Friendship networks
Higher IQ	Valued social role (e.g. care of siblings)	Valued social role (e.g. job, volunteering, helping neighbours
Social skills	Close relationship with one parent	Close relationship with unrelated mentor
Personal awareness		Member of religious or faith community
Feelings of empathy		
Internal locus of control		
Humour		
Attractiveness		

(sources: Emery and Forehand 1994:81; Palmer 1997:203; Gilligan 1997:15 cited in Newman and Blackburn, 2002)

Rutter (1979) regards schools as particularly important in this latter regard because the maximisation of a child's educational potential is considered a key stimulant of resilient adaptation. However, this relates to only one dimension of the groups of factors that are significant in promoting resilience. These factors are outlined in Table 2 and include the personal qualities and characteristics of the child, a supportive and loving family, and supportive individuals or agencies in the immediate social environment - including schools and other significant agencies (Garmezy, 1983 cited in Newman and Blackburn, 2002).

It is argued that, as carers, social workers or educators, we are only able to have some bearing on those areas of resilience that are amenable to influence through social experience and that we are unable to influence aspects of a child's genetic predisposition such as gender or ethnicity (Gilligan, 2001). This notwithstanding, there is ample scope for developing effective intervention in a number of areas. For

young people who are cared for away from home, there may be difficulties in several of the dimensions outlined in Table 2. They may, for example, be cut off from family and social supports and thus have few people who are genuinely concerned about them. Living in care also frequently results in disruption and problems associated with the young person's education - even in those cases where there are no prior indications of difficulties. These problems can lead to difficulties in developing the resilient attributes that enable young people to successfully manage the transition to adulthood.

However, while transitional periods heighten risks for children and young people, they also provide opportunities for change (Rayner and Montague, 2000). Though some believe that failure to acquire resilience characteristics in early childhood is critical, there is evidence that children can develop protective qualities at any developmental stage and that no one stage is predominant (Clarke and Clarke, 2000). If the environment that a young person lives in promotes individual coping skills through protecting him or her from excessive demands, while also providing him or her with opportunities to learn and adapt to reasonable levels of risk, then there is an increased likelihood of successful transitions.

For those working with looked after young people then, including social workers, carers and teachers, it is clearly important to understand what helps young people to do better and what gets in the way of successful progress. It is also important that they share common aims, methods and principles in their work and that these are explicitly adopted within a strategic practice framework. A number of commentators have developed our knowledge about the areas that professionals need to address in their work with looked after children and this provides a basis for a more structured and targeted approach. Some of the key contributions are considered below and offered as a suggested basis for developing more structured practice.

First, in a study of successful educational outcomes of a group of ex-care leavers (Jackson and Martin, 1998) found that the following protective factors were most strongly associated with later educational success:

- ***Stability and continuity*** – maintaining stability and continuity is a valuable protective factor for looked after children. However, some movement between placements, if well managed, need not preclude educational success

- ***Learning to read early and fluently*** – for children who enter the care system, early literacy is particularly crucial because of the absence of consistent and attentive adults in their lives and because of the frequently poor educational quality of their care environment. Also, reading difficulties in older children can be mistaken for cognitive deficits or may result in disruptive classroom behaviour

- ***Having a parent or carer who values education and sees it as the route to a good life*** – young people comment favourably on the support and encouragement they receive from carers. Even in circumstances where this is not appreciated at the time, youngsters frequently value the stimulation and discipline they received retrospectively

- ***Having friends outside care who do well at school*** – not having friendships can have a detrimental effect on the life of a young person but having friends who may get you into trouble can also be unhelpful. Conversely, being friends with high-achieving peers can lead to more positive educational outcomes for looked after children

- ***Developing out of school interests and hobbies*** – being involved in a range of activities helps looked after children to increase social skills and bring them into contact with a wider range of non-care people

- ***Meeting a significant adult who offers consistent support and encouragement and acts as a mentor and possible role model*** - the presence of a positive adult role model in a child's life and having someone who is prepared to talk to and listen to the child has been found to be an important resilience-promoting factor

- ***Attending school regularly*** – many looked after children have very poor records of school attendance. Given that out-of-school support is extremely limited, attending school is an essential factor in educational success

In another important contribution to the development of a more structured approach to practice, Gilligan (2001) asserts that change is possible even in unpromising conditions and that a resilience-led perspective is both optimistic and pragmatic. He has established several areas that ought to be addressed by carers, teachers and social workers in their work with looked after children. These are:

- ***The importance of multiple social roles*** – young people will benefit from taking on other roles besides being the 'young person in care' so that even if things are going badly in one area of their life, they may have 'comfort' areas where things are going reasonably well
- ***The importance of a secure base and stable continuous relationships*** – *stability* entails keeping young people in the same care placement or school; *continuity* entails maintenance of the child's networks of relationships
- ***Identity*** – ensuring that young people know who they are, whom they belong to, and to whom they are important – even if the facts are painful
- ***Self-esteem*** – even where young people have had poor early attachments, they can develop strong self-esteem if they receive positive care-giving relationships at a later age from other significant adults such as teachers or carers
- ***Self-efficacy*** – helping young people to see that their own efforts can make a difference and that taking responsibility and contributing to decision-making can produce their desired results
- ***Keeping in touch*** – helping young people to stay connected to significant figures in their lives or their past (relatives and non-relatives) since these are potential sources of encouragement, affirmation, advocacy and support

- ***Getting the most out of school*** – this entails having a broad view of what is desirable by way of attainment for the young person, recognising that school is a rich environment in terms of relationships and that both social and academic development are important

- ***Promoting positive involvement in leisure activities*** – giving young people the opportunity to engage in leisure pursuits enables them to face challenges and develop a sense of self-determination which allows them to regain control of their behaviour and their lives. Experiencing the pleasure of accomplishment serves to enhance confidence and competence in other areas of their lives

- ***The role of adults*** – adults can have a positive influence on a young person's development in a variety of ways. Communicating genuine interest and concern, taking an active role in time spent together, respecting and listening to their views and being reliable are all qualities that young people value in adults

Finally, in a recent publication, Daniel and Wassell (2002) have identified six key domains where they believe that factors contribute to a child's level of vulnerability or resilience to adversity. Interestingly, they note that these domains are similar to the seven dimensions used in the Looking After Children Materials and they suggest that information gathered in the LAC materials will be useful in assessing resilience in relation to their six dimensions, which are:

- ***Secure base*** – children who have a secure base are more likely to be able to attend school regularly, they are more likely to make good relationships with peers at school and their concentration is likely to be better

- ***Education*** – good educational progress promotes better outcomes in other areas of children's lives. School can act as a complimentary secure base, provides opportunities for developing self-esteem and self-efficacy, and allows children to have constructive contact with peers and supportive adults

- ***Friendships*** – children rely on friendships as they can act as supports in the face of stress and adversity. They allow children to have horizontal relationships as well as vertical relationships with adults and these enable them to acquire social skills such as co-operation and managing conflict

- ***Talents and interests*** – encouraging a child's unique talents and interests can help to boost their self-esteem. Self-esteem is regarded as one of the core elements of resilience and children with high self-esteem have a realistic notion of their abilities and see success as something within their own influence whereas children with low self-esteem attribute success to chance, and failure as something beyond their control

- ***Positive values*** – the development of moral reasoning and 'prosocial' behaviour (having the capacity to act in a helpful, caring responsible way towards others) are vital elements of resilience in young people. Children who exhibit empathy associated with prosocial behaviour are less likely to display aggressive behaviour towards others and, in turn, are more likely to be socially accepted

- ***Social competence*** – children who lack social competence can be withdrawn and find it difficult to engage with other children or communicate effectively with adults. Their confidence is often low and they lack social skills. Lack of social competence can lead to problems in circumstances where conduct is governed by rules and norms for social behaviour, such as schools.

Each of the above models covers a core group of relevant factors. While each may place slightly different emphases on some of these factors, the similarity in the areas that they highlight is striking and it is particularly notable that both reducing unnecessary transitional episodes and upholding the value of education are seen as key elements in promoting resilience factors in children. Together with the part that adults can play in giving young people encouragement and support, these should act as the cornerstone of informed practice.

The 'Looking After Children' Materials

In April 1987 the Department of Health (then the DHSS) set up a working party to consider the question of outcomes in child care. The working party of policy makers, practitioners and academics, produced both a study of the concept of outcome and a series of practical instruments designed to introduce these ideas into everyday social work practice - the Looking After Children (LAC) materials.

The initial meetings of the group focused on the current state of knowledge in child care and the evidence presented at that time reinforced misgivings about the quality of the care experience. A number of studies had shown that children and young people in public care did not have good outcomes compared to their peers (Parker *et al.,* 1991). Indeed, important areas in children's lives such as health and education remained uninvestigated by the research since these were seen as being the concern of agencies other than social services. The working party found that it was not possible to answer fundamental questions about what happened to children in care and no adequate assessment instruments existed to enable researchers or practitioners to determine what might be satisfactory or unsatisfactory outcomes (Ward, 1995). This was an issue that Herbert (1987) had already identified as a fundamental problem, noting that without an objective assessment and record keeping system, it was not possible to evaluate accurately and reliably the progress made by a child.

As a consequence of their deliberations, the working party developed a planning and review system and a series of assessment materials which aimed to balance long-term and short-term child care objectives while looking at the overall well-being of the child rather than concentrating on critical events. The intention of the group was to produce a system, grounded in developmental theory, in which the relationship between input and outcome could be clearly delineated. While acknowledging that the lives of children looked after away from home are profoundly influenced by a multitude of factors, it was their belief that an assessment process that adopted such an interactionist perspective could determine how far the service offered contributed to the probability of success. The materials comprised a series of Planning and

Review forms together with a pack of age-related Assessment and Action Records. (AARs)

The working party identified seven developmental dimensions along which they felt children need to make progress if they are to achieve satisfactory outcomes in adulthood, namely:

- Health;
- Education;
- Identity;
- Family and Social Relationships;
- Social Presentation;
- Emotional and Behavioural Development;
- Self Care Skills.

It was felt that these areas reflected those which were monitored and promoted by 'reasonable' parents (Parker *et* al, 1991) and that the concept of 'reasonable parenting' provided an appropriate standard by which to evaluate the care of children being 'looked after' away from home. The overall package was intended to encourage better quality assessments and help clarify specific roles and responsibilities between various parties, as well as providing a systematic approach to recording. Within the system, education is not only given considerable prominence but it is also recognised that the other domains have an impact on children's educational adjustment and performance (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001). It was felt that the system would bring benefits to individual children and also potential advantages in aggregating information from the records for local strategic planning purposes and for national statistical returns.

During 1991–1995 the materials underwent extensive piloting and amendment in a number of authorities before finally being disseminated and promoted throughout

England and Wales by the Department of Health (Jackson, 1998). At the time of their initial introduction it was anticipated that as many as 90 per cent of English authorities and most of those in Wales and Scotland would be using the system by the end of 1998 (Moyers, 1997). In the event, although these expectations were fulfilled in England and Wales, amended versions of the materials were only finalised and introduced on a pilot basis in Scotland by the end of 1997 (Wheelaghan *et al.,* 1999).

Most Scottish local authorities were not using this system prior to that time because new child care legislation had been developed and implemented in Scotland during the previous few years and it was felt that it would be better to wait until there was greater clarity about the new law before deciding what changes would be needed in the materials to reflect the Scottish context. At the time of writing, however, estimates suggest that virtually all authorities in Scotland are in the process of implementing the system or have already implemented them. An evaluation of the pilot exercise was conducted by a group of researchers from the University of Glasgow and they reported a broadly favourable response to the approach (Wheelaghan *et al.,* 1999).

However, though broadly welcomed in most quarters, a number of detractors have highlighted several concerns regarding the social, political and theoretical bases of the materials. Most notably, Garrett (1999a) argues that the scheme lacks sociological curiosity and fails to address the construction of such social phenomenon as 'childhood', 'good parent' and 'children's needs'. He also suggests that the AAR booklets are potentially oppressive and contain powerful subtexts about, for example, "appropriate" youth lifestyles and the nature of "work" (Garrett, 1999a). Similarly, there are questions of class and gender-bias that some critics (Knight and Caveney, 1998) believe have been largely ignored by the scheme's supporters.

In addition to concerns about the conceptual integrity of the approach, and thus its potentially skewed application in practice, Garrett (1999b) feels that the scheme is

founded upon a predominant political agenda that is pre-occupied with measuring performance. In his view the LAC approach is, therefore, inextricably linked to targeting finite resources rather than ensuring that additional resources are provided where shortfall is identified. Indeed, he argues that the initial purpose for which the LAC materials were designed was not as tools for social work practice, geared solely at improving the standards and outcomes for children in public care but, rather, as research instruments.

The architects of the materials themselves state that they might be used for several purposes, including aggregating data for national and local strategic planning purposes. Parker (1998) for example, suggests that aggregate information about children looked after, collected through the Looking After Children project, should help to establish the chances of certain outcomes being realised. Ward, (1998) similarly asserts that the purpose of providing children's welfare services is to support families in promoting their satisfactory development and that implementation of the LAC materials provides data that enables us to assess how far such aims are achieved both for individual children and for groups. However, a recent action research project designed to use the children's reviewing system to collect aggregate data on the LAC dimensions of well-being found that progress on this aim has been slow, in part because instruments designed to aid practice in individual cases have not adapted easily to the hoped for dual role, and in part because completion rates have been patchy and often poor (Bailey *et al.,* 2002).

Some who have examined the implementation process argue that difficulties arise where management and monitoring systems are not available to support these wider changes and to assess the quality of practice (Jones *et al*, 1998). Despite these misgivings, however, they feel there are clear benefits to using the system and that the potential for raising the quality of life of looked after children is still a major feature of the approach. It is on this premise that they are being presented to practitioners as a means of enhancing their work with this group.

There are, then, inherent tensions within the design of the scheme that have significant implications for their successful introduction into practice. Also, the extent to which it can be confidently claimed that the LAC materials herald improved practice and better outcomes for children in public care remains uncertain. To date there has been little empirical work undertaken which has aimed to measure the impact of the looking after children materials on the outcomes of particular aspects of the lives of children in public care. The study referred to above (Bailey *et al.,* 2002) is sceptical about the viability of using the materials to obtain aggregate data to feed into national and local policy and planning.

In a study using the AAR with 300 children in public care in Canada (Kufeldt *et al.,* 2003) the researchers noted that the results with regard to education were not promising. It was found that the children's educational attainment was below average and that more than 50% of the sample had been tested for learning difficulties. The AARs highlighted that social workers lacked knowledge of the education system, had low expectations of looked after children and failed to initiate action even in circumstances where it was clearly needed. However, the findings in relation to other aspects of the children's development were not so negative, leading the researchers to conclude that, overall, the AARs had considerable potential to improve practice, and thus outcomes for young people in care.

Early indications of the way that professionals in Britain have received these materials are not, however, particularly encouraging. As previously stated, some workers are reluctant to set what they regard as unrealistic goals for children for fear that this might compound their feelings of failure (Ward, 1995). It has also been found that where children are not attending school, social workers tend to leave the education section of the materials blank and not to identify measures that might lead to improvements in, or resolution of, the problem (ibid). This particular finding has been repeated in the study reported here and will be highlighted in more detail in chapter eight.

On a more positive note, the results of a study of 312 young people in a programme in the United States, which has adopted an approach that is similar to the Looking After Children system, indicate that suspension and drop-out rates among the group were lower than for the general school population, 97% of 17-year-olds and 69% of 18-19 –year-olds remained in school post compulsory school age and the majority were performing as well as or better than other students at the same level (Pecora and Prohn, 1998, cited in Jackson and Sachdev, 2001).

The LAC materials appear then, in theory at least, to have the potential to make a positive impact on the general progress of looked after children. However, there is still uncertainty about how effective the materials can be in relation to their educational progress. Chapter eight examines the experiences of the residential care staff who used the materials in this study.

Summary

Having set the scope of the review within the context of residential care services, this chapter has considered a range of literature pertinent to the study topic. It has indicated that early concerns about the poor educational progress of children in public care did not receive much political or professional attention because these concerns were often incidental to the wider and more general issues that were addressed in earlier research. However, cumulatively, a number of studies have demonstrated that there is great cause for concern and, due to increased awareness of the problem, there has been greater research activity during the last decade or so and the matter has also begun to demand more political action and scrutiny.

There is little doubt now that children in local authority care perform badly compared to their peers and the chapter has drawn on a variety of outcome studies to illustrate that a very high proportion leave school without educational qualifications and are subsequently disadvantaged in a number of areas of life. By comparison with the general population, they experience higher levels of unemployment, are more likely to be involved in offences and are less likely to have further education or training.

The period of time that children spend in public care does little to improve their educational performance and much previous research has attempted to explain why this is so. A number of possible explanations have been examined here, including placement instability, pre-care experiences, professional attitudes and expectations, high rates of school exclusion, poor corporate parenting and problems associated with communication and organisation. Given the complexity of the circumstances that typify the experiences of young people in the care system, it is clear that no single explanation can account for the problem. In fact, it appears that their difficulties stem from a complex interplay of some or all of these factors. However, one factor appears to arise consistently in the research and that is that there is a high probability that children coming into public care bring a degree of educational disadvantage with them. Such disadvantage often stems from poor parenting and dysfunctional relationships within their families and/or from the high degree of social exclusion experienced by their families.

Research and statistical reports have also shown that school exclusion rates among looked after children are inordinately high. The high rate of school exclusion among children in public care may reflect structural inequalities within the care and education systems and this appears to be an issue that merits more detailed examination in future investigations. However, there are also individual, family and social factors that account for the young people's school difficulties and the chapter has examined the role of resilience theory in helping to develop a broader understanding of such factors. These areas are explored again later in the thesis in relation to the study's findings. Finally, the development and implementation of the Looking After Children materials, rooted in child development theory, has been heralded as a systematic and theoretically sound approach to improving outcomes for children in public care. The genesis, scope and progress of the materials have been discussed and, though broadly welcomed, there are some concerns about the theoretical and political integrity of the materials and there are indications in the literature that they may not live up to expectations regarding improved outcomes so far as educational progress is concerned.

CHAPTER THREE

THE LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

> "Social problems are not necessarily amenable to purely legal solutions. However, when the legal solution facilitates the potential resolution of a social problem then the use of such means can be justified and the failure to use such means would be inexcusable" (Fabb and Guthrie, 1997)

Introduction

Besides understanding the wider research and theoretical context of the study, as discussed in the previous chapter, there are several reasons why it is important to set the study in the context of the legal and policy framework relating to children in public care. First, the contact between looked after children and those who have responsibility for their day-to-day care (social workers, carers etc.) is driven by legislation and it is argued that social workers must be familiar with the legal framework within which they practice because without a basic knowledge of the law service users may forfeit certain legal rights (Fabb and Guthrie, 1997). Detailing the role of relevant legislation and policy is therefore an important aspect of contextualising this study since, in principle at least, children's educational performance may either be improved or adversely affected by the degree to which legislation and policy are used to promote their right to receive appropriate education. Chapter nine examines this point more fully in the discussion of a number of the study's key findings.

As elsewhere in the UK, child-care legislation in Scotland (The Children (Scotland) Act 1995) is predicated on the belief that it is usually best for children to be raised in the context of their own families and that the state should only intervene when it is demonstrably in the best interests of the child to do so (Ball *et al.,* 2002). However,

there are circumstances where children and young people unavoidably become looked after by local authorities and in these cases social workers are obliged to carry out certain duties and responsibilities towards these children. The test which must now be satisfied in any arena where decisions are made about such children is that the child's welfare is the paramount consideration (Cleland & Sutherland, 2001; Norrie, 1995; Plumtree, 1997).

This overriding principle is particularly important in relation to the educational arrangements for looked after children because while all children have formal, statutory, equality of access to schooling (for example, in their right to attend school), the research findings considered in the literature review indicate that, for looked after children, inequalities in participation within schooling (e.g. in relation to exclusion and attendance) and inequalities in the outcomes of schooling (e.g. in relation to attainment and leaver destinations) persist. Furthermore, such inequalities can also be linked to the wider inequalities of these children's circumstances within society, e.g. socio-economic circumstances, race and gender. Also, given the research findings concerning the general outcome experiences of children who are looked after by local authorities, the impact of educational inequalities is potentially more damaging in the longer term for this group than for any other group of children.

The body of research evidence discussed in the literature review suggests that tackling these inequalities will not only require knowledge and understanding of the range of factors that contribute to this state of affairs, but also determination to reverse the poor outcomes commonly experienced by these young people. However, while these qualities may lead to improvements in individuals' professional practice, obtaining widespread consistency in standards of practice inevitably relies upon the strength and quality of the legal and policy framework. This chapter therefore highlights those aspects of law and policy that relate to local authorities' obligations towards children in public care and illustrates that promoting educational attainment is a clear legal responsibility in social work practice with this group.

Another reason why it is important to examine the legal and policy context is that education and social needs are frequently related and inter-professional liaison is

becoming increasingly necessary (Mays *et al.,* 1999). It has also been recognised in much of the literature that the poor educational performance of children in public care is partly attributable to the fact that responsibility for their education falls into an area of uncertainty between the two major bureaucracies of social work and education (Fletcher-Campbell and Hall, 1990; Walker, 1994, cited in Borland *et al.,* 1998). Berridge (1985) argues that the policies pursued by education authorities will determine the extent to which schools contain their own problems or whether referrals are made elsewhere. Understanding the legal duties, principles and policy directives in each of these two realms is therefore relevant to this study and requires consideration of both.

Finally, Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child asserts the rights of children to appropriate and accessible education. As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, UK domestic legislation has become increasingly influenced by the principles of the Convention (Cleland & Sutherland, 2001) and this is evident in the details of both statutory domains that are presented here. For example, the influence of the UN Convention is apparent in the degree of convergence within both Scottish child care legislation and Scottish education legislation in relation to themes such as collaboration, participation and partnership. However, as will be discussed later, the extent to which these themes have been translated into effective practice remains questionable.

The first part of this chapter begins by detailing whom 'looked after' children are, as defined by the 1995 Act, and by outlining the main provisions of the legislation insofar as they determine the functions and obligations of the local authority for these children. Regulations and guidance relating to the assessment, planning and review processes for children in care are also summarised, focusing particularly on those sections that deal with their educational development. The requirement to prepare and publish children's services plans is then considered.

The second part of the chapter outlines the duty of every local education authority for the delivery of education in their area and highlights the provisions that now give children a right to have access to education. Recent initiatives by the Scottish

Executive have led to new measures to raise standards in schools and those that have particular relevance for the provision of education to looked after children are also detailed.

The chapter concludes with an outline of recent policy initiatives and directives that are of relevance to the subject in question.

Legal Context

The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 – Local Authorities' Duties to 'Looked After' Children

The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 is the primary legislation in Scotland dealing with services and provision for children, young people and their families. The Act was fully implemented by April 1, 1997 and aims to take account of international standards set out in the European Convention on Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Cleland & Sutherland, 2001). The Act sets out the duties and powers available to public authorities to support children and their families and to intervene to provide care and protection when the child's welfare requires it (The Scottish Office, 1997). The Act establishes the legal duties and responsibilities towards children and young people in public care.

The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 is centred on three Child Centred Principles, namely:

- The welfare of the child is the *paramount* consideration
- The child's views should be taken into account in all decisions affecting him or her
- No order should be made unless it is better for the child
- The latest official statistics (Scottish Executive, 2003b) show that local authorities in Scotland looked after almost 11,400 children at 31 March 2003. This represents 1.0 per cent of all children under 18. Approximately fifteen

per cent of looked after children in Scotland live in residential accommodation, some 1,550 young people in total.

In its broadest sense, the term 'looked after' includes a range of children for whom the local authority has some responsibility. The term 'looked after' replaces the previous expression, 'in care', for children who are cared for by public authorities away from their own families. It was first introduced into legislation in the United Kingdom with the implementation of the Children Act 1989 in England and Wales. The Children (Scotland) Act 1995, also subsequently adopted the term. Section 17 of the 1995 Act says that children are 'looked after' when they are:

- Provided with accommodation by the local authority under section 25 of the Act, that is, on a voluntary basis with agreement between the child's parents and the local authority

Or,

- Subject to a Supervision Requirement under the terms of section 70 of the Act, that is, placed under a compulsory supervision order by a children's hearing

Or,

- Subject to an Order or Warrant under Part II of the Act, including a Child Protection Order, a Child Assessment Order, a Place of Safety Order issued by a justice of the Peace or removal to a place of safety by a Police Constable, a Warrant issued by a Children's Hearing or a Sheriff, or a Parental Responsibilities Order,

Or,

- Living in Scotland but subject to a relevant Court Order from England, Wales or Northern Ireland

(Scottish Office, 1997, Vol.2, para.1)

Some looked after children may continue to live with their own families or relatives, for example, if they have been placed under a section 70 supervision requirement by a children's hearing but without a direction to be accommodated by the local

authority. Others may be physically accommodated and cared for away from home, usually in either alternative family placements (foster care) or in some form of residential care. This study has focused specifically on a group of young people who are looked after and accommodated in local authority residential care. While the setting and legal basis of a looked after child's care placement may vary, the range of duties and responsibilities that local authorities must fulfil in relation to all looked after children remains constant. Section 17 specifies these duties, stating that local authorities have to:

- Safeguard and promote the child's welfare, taking the welfare of the child as the paramount concern
- Make use of services that would be available for children were they cared for by their parents
- Take steps to promote regular and direct contact between a child who is looked after and any person with parental responsibilities, so far as it is practicable, appropriate and consistent with the duty to safeguard the child's welfare
- Provide advice and assistance with a view to the time when the child is no longer looked after
- Find out and have regard to the views of the child, his parents and any other relevant person, so far as is practicable when making decisions about a child whom they look after
- Take account so far as is practicable of the child's religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background.

(Scottish Office, 1997, Vol.2, para.2)

Local authorities are only permitted to deviate from complying with these duties when it is necessary to protect members of the public from serious harm (Mays *et al.*, 1999) and then only to the extent that is required to achieve such protection (C(S)A 1995, section 17(5)).

The Legal Requirements

The legal framework encompasses three important aspects of practice that have relevance for the educational arrangements for looked after children namely, assessment, planning and review.

Assessment

The Arrangements to Look After Children (Scotland) Regulations 1996 (Statutory Instruments, 1996) specify a number of requirements that the local authority must meet in fulfilling its responsibilities towards children who are looked after. For example, before looking after a child, or as soon as possible thereafter, the local authority is obliged to make an immediate and long term plan to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child (Regulation 3). The relevant government guidance (Scottish Office, 1997) proposes that the way to accomplish this duty is to undertake a thorough assessment of the child's needs at this point. The aim of such an assessment is to identify any problems that the child or other members of the family face and to highlight ways that these problems can be addressed and strengths built upon (Scottish Office, 1997, Vol.2, para.4).

Schedule 1 of the regulations (Statutory Instruments, 1996) specifies the minimum information that must be obtained to inform the initial assessment process. This includes details of why consideration is being given to the child becoming looked after by the local authority and aspects of the child's personality, social development, interests and recreational activities. Of particular relevance to this study, Schedule 1 also requires information to be gathered about the child's education history and current arrangements for the provision of education. The guidance indicates that a multi-disciplinary assessment is usually best able to provide a full picture of the child's needs (Scottish Office, 1997, Vol.2, para.5) and this would certainly be expected in relation to the child's education.

The assessment should be recorded in writing and conclude with an outline of options and clear recommendations (Scottish Office, 1997, Vol.2, paras.7, 8 & 9). The emphases on *collaboration* between all the relevant agencies during the

assessment process, and on consideration being given to the full range of local authority resources, is a particular feature of the legislation.

The purpose of early assessment is to inform the care planning for the child once he or she becomes looked after. Regulation 6 (Statutory Instruments, 1996) requires the local authority to draw up a written care plan outlining the arrangements that have been made. The care plan should be prepared, wherever practicable, in consultation with the child, those with parental responsibilities, the prospective carers and any others who play an important part in the child's life, including the education authority.

Among other things, the plan should incorporate tangible and achievable education objectives and should detail the responsibilities of the local authority and any others involved with the child, in order to meet these objectives. This will entail indicating who is taking responsibility for what and by when. For each child, consideration must be given to the type of placement and services that will meet his or her assessed needs. For example, some children may require specialist educational provision and the guidance states that before placing a child, the local authority should be satisfied that the placement is appropriate (Scottish Office, 1997, Vol.2, para.25). Guidance also states that consideration should be give to whether any additional services will be required to support the child such as counselling or psychological services (Scottish Office, 1997, Vol.2, para.27).

Planning

Regulations 4, 5 and 6 (Statutory Instruments, 1996) specify the matters that must be given regard in drawing up the care plan. Among other things, these include:

- The nature of the service to be provided in the immediate and longer term, with particular regard to any matters that may have been highlighted through the Schedule 1 assessment process (education needs)

- In the light of any information recorded in Schedule 1, the means of achieving any educational need and the means of achieving continuity in the child's education
- In the case of a placement in a residential establishment, whether that particular placement is appropriate to the child's needs
- Any alternative courses of action

(Statutory Instruments, 1996)

With regard to a young person's educational development, government guidance states that children who are looked after should have the same educational opportunities as all other children, including access to further and higher education and other opportunities for development. Additionally, wherever necessary, they should receive extra help, encouragement and support to address special needs or to compensate for previous deprivation or disadvantage (Scottish Office, 1997, Vol.2, para.61). Given all of the evidence that children in public care are more likely to come from disadvantaged and deprived backgrounds, rigorous application of this guidance would suggest that it could apply to a high proportion of young people in the care system.

In considering their educational and developmental needs within the care plan, local authorities are required to have regard to the continuity of children's schooling. They should also promote their potential and achievement, taking a long-term view of the educational and developmental opportunities available. In doing so, local authorities should involve parents, where appropriate, to ensure that the child receives the support he or she needs to achieve his or her full potential (Scottish Office, 1997, Vol.2, paras.62 & 63).

While partnership with parents is viewed as a crucial element in the planning process, the full participation of the education authority is also seen as vital. The Arrangements to Look After Children (Scotland) Regulations 1996 require local authorities to notify the education authority when a child becomes looked after, unless it is expected that the placement will last less than twenty-eight days

(Regulation 7). It is acknowledged that parents will continue to have responsibility for the child's education in many instances but foster carers or residential care staff can exercise, or share, the parental role in relation to the school in day to day matters. Thus, for example, they can attend parents' evenings or receive school reports. It is recognised that education will often be a significant element in the care plan and it is expected that information about the child's looked after circumstances should be shared with the school as early as possible and that teachers should be aware of the carer's responsibilities. Social workers are required to keep the school informed of all the appropriate care arrangements and how these relate to the child's schooling. In those circumstances where a change of school is unavoidable, it is anticipated that special support will be made available for the child (Scottish Office, 1997, Vol.2, para.64).

Review

The role of carers in supporting the educational arrangements of looked after children is important, not only in identifying any difficulties or development needs, but also in monitoring the child's progress through direct contact with the school and through school reports. Reviewing the child's school progress along with their general welfare is regarded as a major task for carers and it is anticipated that the education authority will provide access to specialist services whenever this is appropriate. The findings reported later indicate that this is an area that requires particular attention and it is questionable, given that school reports were not routinely obtained in this study, whether carers are fully aware of the expectations placed on them in this respect. In those circumstances where a child is excluded from school, whether on a temporary or permanent basis, the local authority is expected to pursue all avenues open to them to have the child re-instated and to ensure that the child receives appropriate education as soon as possible (Scottish Office, 1997, Vol.2, para.65).

The relevant regulations (Statutory Instruments, 1996) require local authorities to review the cases of all children in their care at regular intervals. The first review must be held within six weeks of the care placement being made, the second review

within three months of the first review and subsequent reviews every six months thereafter (Mays *et al.,* 1999). Additional reviews may be necessary in those situations where plans are not being fulfilled or where there are unanticipated changes in the child's or family's circumstances.

Reviews are seen as the cornerstone for monitoring and developing the plans to meet the needs of looked after children. The overall objectives of care reviews are:

- To provide an opportunity to take stock of the child's needs and circumstances at prescribed intervals
- To consult formally with parents and children
- To assess the effectiveness of current plans as a means of securing the best interests of the child
- To provide an opportunity to oversee and make accountable the work of professional staff involved
- To formulate future plans for the child

(Scottish Office, 1997, Vol.2, para.81).

Key professionals who have a significant contribution to make to the review should be invited to attend though, currently, there is no automatic right for all but a few to be present. Who attends depends partly on the views and wishes of the individual child and also on the contribution to be made. However, given the centrality of education to a child's personal and social development, it is the writer's view that teachers ought to be participants in all reviews unless there are good reasons for them not to be. In any event, official guidance states that education professionals should be routinely consulted prior to the review being held and written reports obtained (Scottish Office, 1997, Vol.2, para.107).

Included in the matters to be considered at reviews are any significant events or changes in the child's circumstances or any problems that have been encountered in implementing the care plan. Details of the range of services provided for the child are

pertinent to the discussion and it is important to identify the child's long term needs in a variety of domains, including education, careers and further education, together with what plans have been made to meet these needs.

Children's Services Plans

As previously indicated, collaboration between social work departments and education departments is of central importance to meeting the educational needs of looked after children. Moreover, effective collaboration between all the relevant agencies is necessary to ensure better care standards and improved outcomes for children in public care. Government guidance is clear on this matter and it is expected that the relevant agencies will work together to fulfil their statutory duties. In this regard, education is not viewed simply as the formal provision that is normally available within a school setting. Local authorities are also required to promote any special gifts, talents or interests that a child may have and to encourage their cultural and language development. Children should be given opportunities to develop and pursue leisure interests and supplementary educational arrangements are to be made where these will help the child overcome past disadvantage.

Even in circumstances where the child is looked after for a short period, it is expected that opportunities for development will be available so that the child can sustain progress and new interests on return home (Scottish Office, 1997, Vol.2, para.66). The achievement of these objectives requires co-ordination and cooperation across all the local authority services.

Government guidance therefore has implications for the whole of the local authority and all its services. Prior to the implementation of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, however, only a few Scottish local authorities had specific policies in relation to the education of looked after children (Borland *et al.,* 1998). Since the implementation of the '95 Act, all local authorities in Scotland have a duty under sections 19 and 20 of the Act to prepare, consult upon, review and publish children's services plans. Each local authority is obliged to consider how they intend to provide those services to children that they are legally required to provide (Norrie, 1995). The first children's

services plans were published in 1998, covering the three-year period until 2001. In the study authority, the plan for that period stated that education of looked after children must be given a high priority to compensate for the significant disadvantages these children face (City of Edinburgh Council, 1998). However, the detail of how the key issues should be addressed is limited in that document to five short paragraphs, some of which are lacking in specificity.

By contrast, in the current children's services plan covering the period 2001-2004, (City of Edinburgh Council, 2001). the study authority has identified nine key objectives concerning the educational arrangements for looked after children and in the overall Social Work Service Plan for the period 2003-2006 (City of Edinburgh Council, 2003), there are thirteen key priorities for improving children's services. One of these priorities relates to improving the educational performance of looked after children by ensuring that 95% have a written care plan, including their educational needs, by 2004/05. Another aims by 2005/06 to increase to 90% the percentage of looked after children that are accommodated for more than six months with completed Assessment and Action Records (the current figure is 5-10%). These targets indicate, in principle at least, that strategic policy and planning related to this issue has become more focused.

Summary

Within the overall statutory responsibilities of the local authority, education is seen as a key element in the care planning process for all looked after children. Education authorities are expected to be fully involved from the outset of the care placement and are required to collaborate with social work departments in ensuring that the child's educational and broader developmental needs are met. It is important, however, that such co-operation is sustained throughout the duration of the care placement and that education continues to play a role in monitoring and reviewing the progress of looked after children. The implementation of children's services plans marks a move towards better strategic planning and increased collaboration across a range of agencies. The indications from the study authority's plans are that

improving the educational arrangements for looked after children is viewed as a key priority.

Provision of School Education: The Right of the Child and the Duties of the Education Authority

The Education (Scotland) Act 1980
Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000

Section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 places a general duty on education authorities to secure and provide adequate and efficient provision of school education for their area. The local authority can be taken to court if they are in breach of this legal duty but such action is rare in Scotland (Mays *et al.,* 1999). Parents have a primary duty to ensure that their children receive appropriate education while they are of school age. Where a child is 'looked after' by a local authority, the local authority must comply with the duties of parents in respect of education (Mays *et al.,* 1999).

More recently, section 1 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 has established a complementary statutory right in favour of every child to have a 'school education'. This right applies to children of 'school age' as defined in section 31 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. Broadly, a person is of school age if he or she has attained the age of 5 years and has not attained the age of 16 years. 'School education' is defined in section 1(5)(a) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. The establishment of the statutory right to education reflects in the domestic law of Scotland the right to education which is enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights and in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the United Kingdom being a signatory to these two instruments. From the evidence considered in chapter two concerning the experiences of many children in public care, it would appear that that this right is not been fully accorded to all children. In particular, the inordinately high level of school exclusion, discussed in later chapters, highlights a major rights issue for young people in residential care.

Section 1(1) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, which imposes the general duty on local authorities, is not amended by the more recent legislation. However, the provision in section 2 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000, adopts wording from Article 29(1)(a) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It describes a key aim towards which the education authorities must direct 'school education', that is, to make the development of the personality, talents etc. of the child or young person central to the direction of school education. This new provision puts education authorities in Scotland under a statutory duty to look beyond general provision to the development of the individual child.

Authorities will also be required, in carrying out their duty under this provision, to take account of the child's views when making decisions that would significantly affect them. Thus, both the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and Education legislation in Scotland now reflect Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which sets out the principle that children should be listened to on any matter which concerns them and their views given due consideration in accordance with their age and maturity.

Section 15 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 aims to establish what is effectively a presumption in favour of 'mainstream education' for all children in Scotland. This section will strengthen the rights of children with special educational needs to be included alongside their peers in mainstream schools and, depending on the interpretation adopted by local authorities, could have important implications for the future education arrangements of looked after children. In this context 'mainstream' refers to education in a school other than a special school. At the same time the provision recognises that a mainstream setting may not be appropriate for all children, or in all cases, and sets out circumstances in subsection (3) where a local authority may decide to offer education in a special school. Such circumstances are presumed to only arise *exceptionally*. A local authority will be required to take account of the views of the child and his parents where, after consideration of the circumstances specified in subsection (3), they still believe mainstream to be more appropriate than a special school.

Section 14 of the 1980 Act gives an education authority a discretionary power to educate a pupil elsewhere than at an educational establishment if they are satisfied that by reason of any *extraordinary* circumstances, the pupil is unable to attend a suitable educational establishment. Section 40 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000, re-enacts that provision in a new, substituted, section 14(1)(a) of the 1980 Act. However, the new section 14 introduces an additional statutory duty on education authorities to educate "without undue delay" pupils who are not receiving education in the usual way at an educational establishment.

The categories of pupil covered by this new duty include pupils who have been excluded from school by the education authority. In the case of excluded children, the duty is to find, *without undue delay*, an alternative educational establishment to provide education. If the authority is unable to place the child in another education establishment it is obliged to educate them under special arrangements, normally at home. Section 41 extends the right of appeal against exclusion from school to include pupils with legal capacity in terms of the Age of Legal Capacity (Scotland) Act 1991. In effect, it allows pupils under 16, as long as they have legal capacity, to appeal on their own behalf, independently of their parents. In light of the findings reported later in this study, it will be interesting to see how these provisions affect the circumstances of many young people in public care who have experienced problems in terms of school exclusion and the subsequent failure of education authorities to provide adequate alternative provision.

Summary

The requirements detailed above demonstrate that the statutory provisions of both the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the relevant education legislation have the potential to make a very significant impact on practice and services for looked after children in Scotland. The emphasis on closer collaboration between all the relevant agencies, working together to promote the best interests of the child, is perhaps the most striking of the legal obligations. Indeed, one of the main emphases in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 is on the 'corporate' responsibilities of local authorities

towards children who are looked after. Under previous legislation, the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, responsibility for children in public care lay primarily with the social work department but the 1995 Act stresses that the local authority, *and all its departments*, has a duty to safeguard and promote the interests of looked after children. It is crucial that local authorities find appropriate mechanisms to ensure that these expectations and duties are fulfilled speedily. Central government also has a role to play in this process as the Scottish Parliament now has the main responsibility for co-ordinating education policy across Scotland.

Policy Issues

As highlighted in chapter two, there have been growing concerns since the late 1980's about the educational performance of looked after children and these concerns have led to increased government attention in recent years. This attention stems, in part, from the government's social inclusion agenda, where there is recognition that low levels of educational attainment are critical in generating and sustaining high levels of *social exclusion* among certain groups of vulnerable young people. The poor educational outcomes of children in public care and the clear association of school exclusion with educational alienation and failure resulted in these issues featuring from the inception of the Scottish Parliament as specific targets in a key national agenda strategy document, *Social Justice: A Scotland where everyone matters* (1999).

More recently, linking the broader political agenda to the specific needs of looked after children, the then Minister for Education in Scotland (Jamieson, Scottish Executive, 2003a) recognised that education was an area where this group of young people fared particularly badly. She stated that she was not willing to tolerate a culture that accepts poor educational performance by looked after children but rather that she wanted, 'a culture that expects them to match their peers at the very least and to achieve their fullest potential'. However, while acknowledging the existence of the problem, the Minister, perhaps somewhat complacently, also suggested that progress has been made in meeting the strategic targets, saying that more looked after children

are now in full time education and have care plans that address their educational needs.

It is difficult to share such an optimistic appraisal of the present educational position of looked after children since, despite her positive statement, there is currently little research evidence to support the claim that this group is making better progress. As discussed in the literature review, the most recent research on young people leaving the care system in Scotland (Dixon and Stein, 2002) found that:

- Almost two thirds of young people in the survey had no standard grade qualifications (the most basic level of school qualifications in Scotland)
- 83% had experiences of truancy
- 71% had experiences of being excluded from school
- A quarter of support workers were unaware of the educational attainment of the young person with whom they were working

Besides the exceptionally high rates of truancy - which imply chronic levels of disaffection and alienation among the young people - a particularly worrying feature of these findings is the extremely high rate of formal school exclusion.

Brodie (2001) notes that the issue of non-school attendance has been raised in several of the reports of public enquiries into residential care since the 1980's but that there has been no mention of 'exclusion' as a discrete issue - non-attendance being presented as commensurate with truancy. She also highlights the problem of accessing empirical data on the actual level of school exclusion since there is anecdotal evidence that schools often operate a policy of 'informal' or 'unofficial' exclusion which masks the true extent of exclusion rates among looked after children. The emergence of more empirical data is therefore of great significance, showing as it does, that exclusion rates among this group are inordinately high.

Certainly, from the evidence discussed later in this investigation, it would appear that exclusion is a major problem for children who are looked after in residential care.

Indeed, almost half of the sample experienced either temporary or, permanent exclusion during the study period and the data show that young people in the sample were ten times more likely to be temporarily excluded from school and fifty times more likely to be permanently excluded than children in the general school population. These findings are similar to those of another recent study (Brodie, 2001), which ascertained that eleven of the seventeen young people in residential care in the sample had prior experience of either fixed-term or permanent exclusion. It was also considered that this might have been an underestimate because records did not always contain sufficient details about past school experiences and carers and social workers were frequently unclear about previous episodes of exclusion.

Alongside changes in the legislative frameworks, the policy arena has witnessed increased levels of activity in other ways during the last decade or so. During the early part of the 1990s a series of official government reports (Utting Report, 1991; Skinner Report, 1992; Warner Report, 1992) were critical of practice in residential care and emphasised that education was a vital integral aspect of a child's placement and not an optional add-on. A few years later the Audit Commission (1994) was also critical of the level of educational support that children in care received and noted, especially, the culture of blame that existed, with education and social services each accusing the other of failing the young people.

The importance of inter-agency collaboration was subsequently stressed in joint guidance issued by the Department of Health and Department for Education (DoH/DFE, 1994). Above all, the guidance underlined that, 'wherever children looked after are placed, their education should always be a prime consideration and the various authorities should always co-operate to see that effective provision is made (p20, para 52, cited in Fletcher-Campbell, 1997). The following year, a joint inspection by the Office for Standards in Education and Social Services Inspectorate resulted in a strongly worded report (Ofsted/SSI, 1995) re-emphasising the need for close collaboration to ensure appropriate educational arrangements for looked after children.

In Scotland, political awareness of the problems was also heightened following publication of a comprehensive review of the literature (Borland *et al*, 1998). Shortly thereafter, a joint HMI and SWSI inspection was undertaken in 1999-2000 to evaluate the social work and educational services provided by local authorities to meet the educational needs of looked after children living away from home. The report of the inspection ('Learning with Care', HMI/SWSI, 2001) confirmed that many looked after children in Scotland were being failed. The report has prompted a further flurry of activity and currently the Scottish Executive has established, among other objectives, three fundamental priorities for improving the educational provision for looked after children, namely, that:

- all looked after children should receive full-time education
- all looked after children should have a care plan which adequately addresses educational needs and
- all schools should have a teacher designated to championing the interests of these children

In pursuit of these objectives, the Executive provided additional funding of £10 million in October 2001 to provide books, equipment and homework materials for every looked after child in Scotland. The funding was intended to ensure that all looked after children are provided with an educationally rich environment. Scottish Ministers were concerned that, as shown in the "Learning with Care" report (2001), looked after children are failing to achieve the average educational standards for their age group and stage of development. Ministers wanted the money to be targeted towards improving educational attainment by helping local authorities to implement the plans they had for the education of looked after children and enabling them to maximise their potential.

In England and Wales, the Quality Protects Education Project Team was set up in February 1999 to help local authorities meet the Government's children's services objectives in relation to the life chances of children in need and looked after children. The five year Quality Protects Programme is designed to improve the management

and delivery of children's social services. The Government has set national objectives and one of the key strands of the programme is improving the life chances of children looked after by local authorities. The government issued key messages for schools from the "Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care" (Department for Education and Employment, 2000a). The guidance tackles the serious underachievement of children in residential and foster care, and aims to bring their attainment closer into line with that of their peers. The guidance highlights the important role of schools and summarises the main expectations of schools and the measures which will affect them. Key features of the guidance are:

- They require local authorities to provide all looked after children with a Personal Education Plan (PEP) within 20 days of entering care or joining a new school;
- The appointment of Designated Teachers in schools to act as resource and advocate for looked after children, liaising with social services departments and other key stakeholders on behalf of children:
- Specific time limits within which local authorities must secure educational placements for their looked after children;
- Directing local authorities to establish protocols for sharing information so that schools, LEAs and SSDs share relevant, up -to date information to help carers and others with day-to-day responsibility for the children to be better informed to carry out their role as corporate parents.

In the guidance the government set the target to improve the educational attainment of children looked after by local authorities, by increasing to at least 50% by 2001 the proportion of children leaving care at 16+ with at least one GCSE or GNVQ equivalent and to 75% by 2003.

More recently still, in March 2001, the Prime Minister asked the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) to report on the educational achievement of children in care. In preparing their report (SEU, 2003), the SEU consulted with a wide range of people and organisations, including looked after children; held a series of meetings with key

stakeholders including young people, Social Services Departments, social workers, Local Education Authorities, teachers, foster carers, private sector providers, other statutory agencies (like Youth Offending Teams, Health Authorities), business, and voluntary agencies; undertaken a series of five area studies focusing on the arrangements for looking after and educating children in five local authority areas in England; visited projects that are good practice examples of schemes to improve the educational attainment of children in care and; established a knowledge pool - a web-based tool designed to aid the process of evidence-based policy-making by bringing together experts to share resources, ideas and knowledge.

Summary

Increased research activity and burgeoning policy developments have begun to impact on the planning and delivery of educational services to looked after children. As outlined above, these elements have occurred within the wider context of revised child care legislation in the UK - the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. With their emphases on upholding children's rights and promoting the importance of the child's welfare and development, the legislation has played a part in raising awareness at local and national level. However, to date, there are few signs that legal and policy developments have had a major impact on the educational performance of children in public care. It may be that the effect of these developments has yet to filter through into the educational outcomes of these children or, as suggested in chapter two, that policy is outstripping the current state of knowledge about the factors that lead to this situation. In the case of the latter explanation, the research reported here may help to achieve a more informed approach to policy.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The previous chapters have explained the rationale for undertaking a study of the educational experiences of looked after children and have set this in the context of relevant research, legislation and policy. This chapter now turns to the question of how the study was conducted and what it aimed to achieve.

According to Bulmer (1984), it is important, when discussing the development and implementation of a research methodology, to consider the theoretical principles that underpin the research process as well as the specific strategies that are adopted. However, Brodie (2001) reminds us that the strategic and theoretical perspectives adopted are not the only factors that relate to the design of a study and she argues that the subject and the group that is being studied also affect the way that a study is undertaken.

Bearing all of these points in mind, this chapter begins by considering the nature of the research problem that the study sought to address, relating this briefly to some of the issues raised earlier in the literature review. In particular, this part of the discussion highlights the emphasis in previous research on identifying the causes of the poor educational performance of looked after children and the ensuing realisation among investigators that specific measures of intervention are required to redress the disadvantage that many young people bring to the care experience. Given that one of the central objectives of the LAC materials is to improve a range of outcomes for looked after children, it is suggested here that implementation of these materials

ought to enhance the educational outcomes of this group and this was a matter that the study intended to address.

The specific aims of the investigation and the research questions flowing from these are next defined. This is followed by a summary of the theoretical considerations that helped to shape the methodological approach adopted. This discussion serves as an introduction to the design and methods used in the study and these are then presented followed by discussion of some ethical considerations, the organisation of the fieldwork and the conduct of the study.

As work commenced on the study a number of difficulties arose which made it impossible to adhere to every aspect of the proposed methodology and this had an effect on the eventual conduct of the research. The difficulties encountered, and the impact of these on the focus of the study, are described in the final section of the chapter.

The Research Problem

As detailed in chapter two, a strong body of evidence has emerged over a considerable period of time which demonstrates that children in public care perform poorly in school compared to young people in the general population. For policymakers, managers, researchers and practitioners it is extremely important to try to understand why this should be so. Most previous studies have therefore focused on the *causes* of the low levels of educational attainment among looked after children. For example, Jackson (2001) comments that an earlier study by Osborne and St. Claire (1987) was concerned to establish whether the poor educational progress of children in care was due to the care experience or the pre-care environment. Similarly, a major study (Aldgate *et al,* 1993) of a group of children in relatively stable foster care placements addressed a number of questions, including:

- Do teacher expectations affect pupil's progress?

- Does the social class and educational level of children's carers affect their progress?
- Do aspects of the children's social work histories and planning affect their progress?

While the data obtained from Aldgate's study (ibid) showed that teachers did have low expectations of the children's educational attainment, the researchers concluded that this was because the teachers knew the children well and their judgements were *consequences* rather than *causes* of the children's performance.

That study also found that the social class of the children's carers mattered less than the educational level achieved by the carers and there were some indications that younger children placed with carers who had achieved reasonably successful levels of education made better progress. However, overall, there was little evidence to support the view that this was a major factor or that older children who were placed in such environments made greater progress.

The main finding arising from their investigation was that children's early histories before entry into care may have a profound effect on their educational attainment in middle childhood and their data indicated that, given their low starting point, greater than average progress would be needed for the children in the sample to have caught up with the national averages for educational attainment (Heath, Colton & Aldgate, 1994).

As previously described in the literature review, therefore, there is strong evidence to suggest that a high percentage of children coming into care already have educational difficulties prior to being placed. Further examples of such evidence include a report issued by the Department of Health (1993) where it was noted that many children being looked after by local authorities in England and Wales enter care behind in their education. A small-scale study in Lothian (Francis *et al.,* 1996) found that more than three-quarters of the children in the sample were said to have school problems before they were taken into care. Similarly, the report of an examination of

educational attainments of young people in care in Humberside (1995) highlighted that many of the children in that authority's care were likely to have entered the care system already seriously educationally disadvantaged.

So, from the knowledge that is currently available, adverse early experiences, including personal, social and economic disadvantage, appear to have a significantly damaging effect on the educational progress of young people before they enter the care system. While recognising that other factors may exacerbate the situation once a young person is placed in care, findings to date indicate that this may be one of the most significant causal factors of their poor educational performance.

This conclusion is particularly significant when one relates it to the findings of a number of studies that have examined the background circumstances of children who are received into care (e.g. Bebbington and Miles, 1989; Mapstone, 1969; Packman, 1986; Packman and Hall, 1998; Rutter, Quinton & Liddle, 1983). These studies show that the families of the great majority of looked after children are typically characterised by poverty and disadvantage and, as discussed in chapter two, studies have shown that there is a correlation between social disadvantage and poor educational performance (e.g. Halsey et al., 1980).

The inference that may be drawn from these related bodies of enquiry is that, given the disadvantaged home circumstances of the majority of looked after children, it is likely that most young people in public care bring a level of educational disadvantage with them into the care situation. Besides identifying any additional factors that may exacerbate or contribute to these pre-existing difficulties then, the main issue confronting practitioners and policymakers is *to identify effective intervention measures* that will bring about an improvement in the educational outcomes of these young people. It is this problem of identifying effective measures to combat the low level of educational attainment of looked after children that is one of the central concerns of this study.

How then does the study address the issue? - Following their findings, Aldgate and her colleagues (1993) stated that remedial intervention was needed from the outset of a young person's placement and they argued that something more than 'normal' parental interest would be required to compensate for the educational disadvantage that resulted from earlier deprivation.

The LAC materials were specifically designed, among other things, to improve a range of outcomes for individual children in public care (Parker *et al*, 1991). The simple slogan of the materials is 'good parenting – good outcomes' (Kufeldt *et al.*, 2003) and they were constructed to afford service providers with an easy to administer, easily understood and broadly applicable assessment and planning system. Given the underpinning belief that the materials can act as an agent for positive change in different dimensions of a child's life, it is argued here that they might reasonably be expected to improve the educational performance of the young people concerned. In fact, it has been stated elsewhere that the Looking After Children materials, if properly used, can make an effective contribution to improving the educational progress of looked after children (Skuse and Evans, 2001 in Jackson (ed), 2001). In this sense, use of the Looked After Children Materials represents something more than 'normal' parental interest in a child's education and they therefore satisfy the requirement stipulated above by Aldgate and her colleagues. In light of this, one of the key issues addressed by this study was whether the LAC materials would help to improve the educational outcomes of a group of young people in residential care.

Research Aims

The study had four main research aims, namely:

- To examine and describe the level and degree of educational difficulty that a group of young people in residential care brought to their care episode
- To consider how their educational circumstances and performance were affected by their care experience

- To evaluate the effectiveness of the education component of the Assessment and Action Record (AAR) in relation to the educational progress of a sub-set of the study sample.
- To explore the views and experiences of the carers responsible for implementing the approach in order to gain some insight into the *process* of using the AAR materials and the potential benefits, deficits, obstacles and rewards for the young people concerned.

Research Questions

Trochim (2002) argues there are three basic types of approaches/questions that research projects can adopt:

1. **Descriptive.** When a study is designed primarily to describe what is going on or what exists.
2. **Relational.** When a study is designed to look at the relationships between two or more variables.
3. **Causal.** When a study is designed to determine whether one or more variables (e.g., a program or treatment variable) causes or affects one or more outcome variables.

According to Trochim (ibid) most social research is interested in the third type of question, that is, looking at cause-effect relationships in social situations. By this he means that for most social scientists it is important to go beyond just describing the world or looking at relationships between variables. While these are important aspects of the research process, if we wish to change situations that we regard as undesirable and if we want to do this in an organized, scientific way, we must examine causal relationships that tell us how, for example, programs or treatments affect the outcomes of interest.

The three types of approach can therefore be viewed as cumulative. That is, a relational study assumes that you can first describe (by measuring or observing) each

of the variables you are trying to relate and a causal study assumes that you can describe both the cause and effect variables and that you can show that they are related to each other. Causal studies, however, are probably the most demanding of the three, as proved to be the case in this study.

The three types of questions outlined by Trochim were incorporated in the research questions here and these were linked to the principal aims of the study. The questions the study aimed to address were:

- Is there evidence that looked after young people have pre-existing education problems?

- If young people bring educational disadvantage into the care situation, are these difficulties addressed at an early stage in the placement?

- How does the experience of being looked after affect the educational progress of children?

- Can the LAC materials result in better educational outcomes for young people in residential care? If so, in what way?

- Which aspects of the materials are felt to be most beneficial?

- Are the materials useful in co-ordinating the education arrangements of looked after children?

- Do they help to engage young people and their parents in discussions about their educational needs?

- Are the roles and responsibilities of professionals clearer as a consequence of using the materials?

- Does the Assessment and Action Record help in the assessment, planning and review of the educational experience of looked after children?

- Do the materials help to improve joint practice between carers, social workers and schools?

Theoretical Basis of the Research

Before embarking on a detailed description of the research design it is useful to begin with an overview of my examination of the literature concerning research methodology since this proved crucial in informing the approach adopted.

As the intention of the study was to increase the degree of 'complementarity', whereby overlapping and different aspects of a phenomenon may emerge, and 'expansion of the data', where the methods used add scope and breadth to the study, (Brannen, 1992; Bryman, 1988; Robson, 1993) a range of methods was explored. Part of the process of reviewing the range of available research methods entailed identifying the potential strengths and limitations of a number of approaches and considering how these would best suit the purposes of this particular study.

For example, Bullock *et al* (1993b) state that when the information required is rather specific and known to the people who are studied and when the researcher already has a lot of knowledge about relevant problems and the range of responses likely to arise, the *survey method* is the most appropriate. However, since neither of these two conditions applied here it was felt that this would not be a suitable approach to adopt and this method was discounted at an early stage in the design process.

On the other hand, Cheetham *et al* (1997) contend that in social work research certain *evaluative methodologies* are likely to be adopted with greater frequency than other methods because of the nature of social work and because there are now greater internal and external pressures on social workers to demonstrate the effectiveness of their work. Given the intention to examine the effectiveness of the Looking After

Children materials, this was certainly a factor that influenced the ultimate choice of research design in this case.

Bulmer *et al* (1986) claim that different research methods are not inherently better or worse than any other on the basis of intrinsic qualities, but superior or inferior for particular purposes. Similarly, Bryman (1988) states that gradually the question has shifted from "which method is most valid?" to "which method is best for what purpose under what circumstances?" and according to Brewer and Hunter (1989) convergence of findings is achieved through combining methods whose weaknesses differ.

With these points in mind, I found it particularly worthwhile to gain some understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of Empirical and Phenomenological research approaches, particularly the central features of 'Positivism' and of the 'Interpretive Paradigm' representing, as they do, two distinct arguments concerning the philosophy and principles of research methodology. Additionally, given the nature of the chosen field of study and the points alluded to above, it proved very helpful to acquire an appreciation of the role and purpose of 'Evaluation Research' with its emphasis on the 'real world' nature of research in the social sciences.

Cheetham *et al*, (1997) argue that evaluative research in the field of social work must take account of the complexities of the context, tasks and methods of the work. They also state that studies should be comprehensible and relevant to the interested parties and should seek to be useful for policy makers, practitioners and users. This was certainly my intention in this investigation.

Positivism and the Interpretive Paradigm

(Empiricism and Phenomenology)

The term 'positivism' is historically linked to the nineteenth century French philosopher, Comte, who first used the expression to refer to a particular philosophical position which can be understood by reference to his 'Law of Three

Stages' whereby the human mind progresses from a theological stage, through a metaphysical stage and thence to a positive stage (Acton, 1975).

In the theological and metaphysical stages, behaviour is explained in terms of spiritual, supernatural forces or as abstractions or forces which Comte regarded as depersonalised versions of the former. Comte viewed both the theological and metaphysical as rather primitive stages, unlike the positive stage which relies upon the more scientific process of observation and reason as a means of explaining and understanding behaviour.

Following Comte's lead, the positivist doctrine, rooted in the empiricist tradition, holds that all true knowledge is based upon the observable and thus knowledge can only be extended by the use of reasoned inquiry involving observation and experiment. Certainly, as Giddens (1976) points out, the positivist argument rests upon two main suppositions. First, that the methodology of the natural sciences can be applied to the social sciences, with social scientists acting as observers of social reality. Second, that the findings of social scientists can be organised in terms of 'laws' or 'rules', similar to those that are developed in natural science. Disciples of this particular doctrine argue that the meanings attached to behaviour by way of metaphysical or theological explanation are invalid. This is clearly a rigid and dogmatic view and there is much debate among social scientists about it.

A major criticism of the positivist doctrine is that it fails to take account of the significance of the human ability to interpret experiences and to develop theoretical perspectives of the world based upon these interpretations. Moreover, the meanings acquired through interpretive processes enter the human world and influence people's behaviour in it. Failure to take account of this factor can be viewed as a fundamental flaw in the positivist argument. Similarly, opponents of this paradigm contend that the findings resulting from positivist methods in social sciences are unlikely to convey consequential meaning for those operating in the real world of human interaction, such as social workers. The complexity and irregularity of social phenomena distinguish them from the more ordered features of the natural sciences

and thus render the natural science paradigm weaker as a means of explaining social behaviour.

Taking these arguments concerning the mechanistic and reductionist nature of positivism into account, it becomes apparent that much can be gained from acquiring an understanding of a different philosophical perspective in social science research. Within the broad chapel of phenomenology, the interpretive paradigm represents such an alternative philosophy.

Curtis and Mays (1978) identify a number of points that distinguish the philosophy of the interpretive paradigm from positivism including;

- A belief in the importance of subjective consciousness
- An understanding of consciousness as active and
- A claim that there are essential structures to consciousness of which we gain direct knowledge by a certain kind of reflection

Within this approach, the researcher's task is to understand the experiences of the participants and to reveal the meaning of an event without categorising the phenomenon in the context of a known theory, concept or personal preconceptions.

Thus Omery (1983) describes the following significant differences between positivism and phenomenology;

- The traditional scientific method is based on experimentation while the phenomenological method adopts a descriptive strategy.
- The objective of the traditional method is causal analyses, whereas the objective of phenomenology is identification.
- The principle of thinking in the traditional method is calculative, whereas thinking in phenomenology is principally meditative.

- The predominant scientific approach adopts a statistical strategy and makes analyses more efficient. In contrast, the phenomenological method promotes an understanding of human beings, wherever they might dwell.

While the positivist and interpretive paradigms may appear to represent polarised views of research theory and methodology, this researcher feels there was much to be gained from adopting aspects of both forms of enquiry in this study. My intention, therefore, was to develop a research strategy that harnessed both the rigorous scientific features of the positivist paradigm and the qualitative characteristics of the phenomenological approach. Given the applied nature of the investigation, however, it also proved beneficial to acquire an understanding of the literature on evaluation research.

Evaluation Research

According to Tripodi *et al* (1971) evaluation research can have a variety of aims. For example, the focus may be on the 'effort' or 'effectiveness' or 'efficiency' of a programme. Knowledge of evaluation theory and methods therefore appeared to be relevant in this instance since, as already stated, one of the main aims of this study was to evaluate the 'effectiveness' of the LAC materials in improving the educational performance of a group of young people in residential care. Furthermore, Robson (1993) suggests that evaluation is one type of applied research that is often adopted by social scientists who are involved in trying to assess the worth or value of some intervention or service in such fields as health, education and social work. Broadly speaking then, evaluation research is part and parcel of policy insofar as it aims (as this study did) to discover whether a particular method is actively accomplishing what it set out to accomplish.

Bulmer, (1986) states that evaluation might usefully help decision makers to decide;

- Whether or not to continue a policy.
- How to improve a policy.
- Whether to add or withdraw specific features of a policy.

- How to introduce similar policies elsewhere.
- How to allocate resources between competing alternatives.
- Whether to accept or reject the theoretical basis on which a policy rests.

The potential value of adopting evaluation methodology in this study was therefore twofold. First, it might help contribute to the ongoing development of strategic policy in relation to the LAC materials. Second, it could lead to extending knowledge that may result in further refinement of the materials, thus having value in those practice settings where the materials were most likely to be used.

Three components of evaluation research are suggested in the literature (Goldberg and Connolly, 1982)

1. **Objectives** – in this case, what do the LAC materials set out to achieve?
2. **Process** – what means are employed?
3. **Outcomes** – how successfully are the objectives achieved? What factors indicate success, are there any unanticipated consequences?

This theory was influential in determining the nature of the approach adopted in this study because, while some definitions of evaluation research draw attention solely to the importance of *outcomes* in programmes and others argue that the *process* involved in the programme must be included, this model gives equal weighting to both and also links these to the stated objectives of a programme.

Whatever the preferred emphasis within an evaluation study, however, most, like Rutman (1977), are united in asserting that evaluation research should ultimately be expected to adhere to accepted standards of research methodology. This view informed and underpins the approach that was adopted here. Also, given the political dimensions of evaluation research, and the inherent potential for external pressure from stakeholders, this researcher was conscious of the need to adopt a rigorous and systematic approach to the research design in order to ensure validity.

However, in any evaluation the selection of criteria to measure success is problematic. Firstly, one must have grounds for believing that the intervention is capable of affecting the variables selected as indices of success. This presupposes that theory and knowledge about the intervention has been developed sufficiently to allow such assumptions to be made. Secondly, the question of 'success in whose terms?' poses itself, particularly where objectives are broad.

Neither of these potential difficulties appeared to be a particular concern in this case since, in relation to the first consideration, the theoretical and conceptual basis of the LAC materials was firmly rooted in a child development model linked to the concept of 'good parenting' (Parker *et al*, 1991). The materials were developed by a group of noted academics and incorporated advice from a variety of experts and specialist agencies including the Early Childhood Development Unit at Bristol University. The materials assume a link between input and outcome and assess not only how far children have progressed along a developmental dimension but also the extent to which they are given the opportunity to succeed. In addition to the sound theoretical basis of the method, the materials underwent extensive piloting in a number of local authorities in England and Wales before achieving their final format. During the pilot phase, a consultation group of education professionals advised on specific issues in that area and recommended appropriate revisions to the materials (Ward, 1995). It did not seem unreasonable, therefore, to suppose that they were capable of affecting the educational progress of looked after children.

With regard to the second matter, the aim defined within this study was focused narrowly on the educational performance of the young people. Success was therefore related to three specific aspects of their education. Namely, attendance, attainment and behaviour, all three of these elements routinely being the subject of end of year school reports.

Rossi, Freeman and Wright (1979) say that the starting point of any evaluation study is the question of whether or not a particular social policy works. In their view, evaluation research might operate on a variety of levels and could, for example,

focus on the assessment of a programme's outcomes. As with other forms of research, they consider that evaluation requires precise definition and operationalisation even though it occurs in what Weiss (1972) refers to as an 'action setting'. Within such a context it is acknowledged that the design of a study, what variables are to be considered, and how it should be carried out, are influenced greatly by the nature of the programme in question. Related to this is the fact that the sample for the study is often predetermined by the way the programme is constructed and targeted on a particular population. The latter point was particularly relevant in this research.

How then was the research design constructed? Drawing on the views outlined above, the study was undertaken using methods from a range of social science research techniques as detailed in the following section.

The Research Design

The research design was adopted following careful consideration of the aims of the study and the range of methods that were most suited to achieving these aims. Among the factors taken into consideration in this process was how best to gather details of the histories and backgrounds of the young people, how to measure the impact of the LAC materials on the educational progress of the sample and how to obtain the views of staff about their experience of using the approach.

Data from Casework Files

With regard to the first of these objectives, a structured data schedule was devised to obtain relevant information about the young people in the sample from existing case records (see Appendix 1). The schedule incorporated sections concerning the young people's general characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity etc.); their family backgrounds; reasons for social work involvement; placement details; care histories; education and school experiences.

Existing case records were chosen as the primary source of these data for a number of reasons. First, it was considered that these documentary sources were likely to constitute the most comprehensive source of available information about the young people's backgrounds and current circumstances. Second, it was felt that the data obtained by this method would reflect the most accurate and realistic picture of the information base that was actually used in practice. Finally, it was believed that obtaining details of the information held on case-files would highlight the strengths and limitations of these records as a basis for effective decision-making. It was anticipated that there would be wide variation in the quantity and quality of information held in case records since this had been my experience in earlier work and has also been the experience of other researchers (e.g. Brodie, 2001).

An approach using these sources of data was also considered appropriate since this aspect of the research was concerned to illuminate and describe the significant features of the histories and experiences of the young people (both in relation to their family backgrounds and in relation to school and to being 'looked after'). This theoretical method has been applied in other studies of social problems (e.g. Brodie, 2001; Ince, 1998) in what has been termed 'information gathering approaches' (Layder, 1993).

Brodie (ibid) found that using such an approach was useful for contextualising individual experiences and this effect was also anticipated here. Furthermore, the approach was considered useful as it would serve to highlight the level, degree and nature of educational difficulties that the young people had experienced and the relationship between this and their previous care episodes. It was anticipated that use of the documented information would facilitate the construction of a broad picture to depict the young people in relation to a network of situations including home, care and school.

Quasi-Experiment

The second part of the design demanded a different methodological strategy since the objective here was to evaluate the effect of the LAC Assessment and Action Records (see Appendix 2) on the young people's educational performance.

Rossi *et al,* (1979) say that there is wide agreement among evaluation researchers that the most desirable model is the randomised controlled trial (RCT). The randomised control trial is a trial in which subjects are randomly assigned to one of two groups: one (the experimental group) receiving the intervention that is being tested, and the other (the comparison group or control group) receiving an alternative (conventional) treatment. The two groups are then followed up to see if there are any differences between them in outcome. The results and subsequent analysis of the trial are used to assess the effectiveness of the intervention, which is the extent to which a treatment, procedure, or service does individuals more good than harm. Randomised control trials are the most stringent way of determining whether a cause-effect relation exists between the intervention and the outcome (Kendall, 2003).

The literature suggests that experimental designs are preferred because the problem in evaluation research lies in identifying exactly which variables have exerted any influence, those purposely built into a particular programme or those that may have just happened (Phillips *et al*, 1994). Cheetham *et al* (1997) suggest that many researchers are attracted to the experimental design in evaluation studies because of its potential capacity for reducing the elements of interaction in a situation to a simple relation of cause and effect. In many respects, this would have been the preferred model for the study undertaken here as one of the central aims was to examine the impact of an independent variable, (the LAC materials), on a dependent variable, (the educational progress of the sample).

However, although randomised controlled trials are powerful tools, their use in social science practice raises a number of important ethical and practical concerns. For example, in a simple experiment with two groups the question that arises is whether the design is discriminatory since it is argued that exposing subjects to an

intervention believed to be inferior to current treatment is unethical (Sibbald and Roland, 1998). This was not an issue in this instance since the intervention was designed to improve what was already provided. However, in these cases the complaint is then that the comparison group is being denied an intervention that may be beneficial.

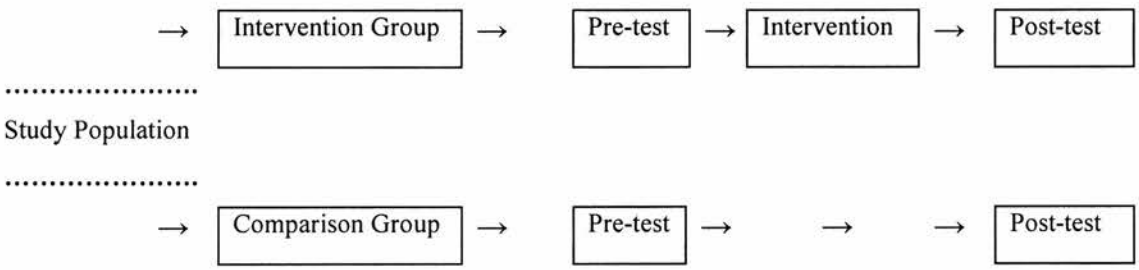
These arguments have been countered with the view that the method is only unethical if we know which group is to be disadvantaged (Fitz-Gibbon, 1996). Usually, the aim of research which adopts an experimental design is to determine which is better or worse, the intervention or no intervention. From an ethical stance then, it is argued that doing nothing to find out what works can damage the chances of others.

Setting aside these ethical arguments, there were major practical considerations that made it impossible to adopt a classic randomised control experiment. First was the inability to randomly allocate subjects to the experiment and control groups since the young people in the study population were already allocated to particular residential settings. Also, as Cheetham and her colleagues (1997) point out, a major problem in adopting the experimental design in social work is that much of the service delivery does not come in specifically identifiable components and thus it may prove difficult to attribute change in the experimental group to a specific intervention.

Given the constraints that militated against the classic experimental design, the design adopted therefore incorporated an approach which necessarily comes into the category of a quasi-experiment to allow the collection of 'pre-test' and 'post-test' data. An important consideration in incorporating this approach was that the study included a focus on a relatively self-contained intervention rather than a range of factors (Cheetham *et al*, 1997). I was principally interested in determining whether a specific intervention (the use of the 'looked after children' (LAC) materials) had a *causal* effect on the outcome (the educational performance of a group of looked after children) of a programme and in my view the quasi-experiment was the method most likely to achieve this objective.

Royse (1991) suggests that quasi-experimental designs are those that fall a little short of the 'ideal' but he recommends such an approach when randomisation is not possible. My intention at the outset of the study, therefore, was to use the 'non-equivalent pre-test, post-test comparison group' design to measure the educational performance of the young people in the study, since it is regarded as the most internally valid design that can be implemented in applied settings (Judd and Kenny, 1981, in Royse, 1991). For operational purposes, the outcome measure to be used was the end-of-year school report and 'educational performance' was defined in terms of 'attendance', 'behaviour' and 'attainment in English and Mathematics'.

With the exception of random allocation of the individual young people, the design of the study incorporated the features and advantages of the classic experimental research design and is schematically represented below.



Individual Interviews

The final aim of the study was concerned with eliciting information from those residential care staff that had used the LAC materials about their experiences and views of using these materials in their work with the young people. For this part of the study, face-to-face qualitative interviews with each of the six residential workers was chosen as the preferred method of data collection as it was felt that this would maximise the opportunity for those involved to express their views and opinions about their experiences. A semi-structured interview schedule with open questions

was employed to encourage respondents to give extensive and detailed responses (see Appendix 3).

A pilot interview was held with one of the residential care workers and this served to illustrate a number of points. On a practical level, it demonstrated how important it is to ensure that recording equipment is of a sufficiently high standard to ensure a good quality recording of the interview (I had considerable difficulty transcribing the tape of this interview as the sound reproduction was poor). The pilot also made me realise that there would be some value in speaking with the workers prior to interview (by telephone) to ask them to review the materials they had completed and to think about their experience of using them. On the occasion of the pilot interview, the worker had not looked at the materials before our meeting. Consequently, she continually referred to the forms during the interview, which not only disrupted the flow of the interview but also caused considerable noise which reduced the quality of the recording.

The pilot also highlighted my own lack of familiarity with the interview process and encouraged me to make thorough preparations in future interviews. I quickly found, too, that I needed to adopt a style of presentation that would enable the interviewee to feel comfortable. During the pilot the interviewee was often very hesitant in her answers and I found that I frequently had to use prompts and follow-up questions. I also found that the interview did not flow as well as I would have liked and it was noticeable that the respondent gave very brief answers during the initial stages of the interview as I often asked lengthy questions. I used this experience to ensure in subsequent interviews that my questions were more succinct and to encourage the respondents to offer fuller responses wherever possible.

Despite some of the drawbacks identified, the data gathered in the pilot interview gave a useful insight into the experience and perceptions of the worker and confirmed that the interview method adopted was appropriate for my purposes.

Ethical Issues

Besides being aware of the important ethical questions discussed in the design of the study and in the methodological approaches adopted, the researcher was conscious of other practical ethical concerns. Alderson (1995) identifies a number of factors that should be taken into account when undertaking research with children. Among others, these factors include: the purpose of the research; respecting privacy and confidentiality; information for the children, parents and other carers; giving consent; and the impact on children who take part in the research and more widely.

These matters were given careful consideration during the preparation and performance of the research. For example, throughout the conduct of the study the researcher has taken great care to ensure that the confidentiality of individuals has been maintained. This was achieved by use of a coded numerical system in the logging and analysis of data and in the use of anonymised names in reporting the research findings.

Furthermore, written permission was sought from the young people and their parents for their inclusion in the study and it was stressed that the research was concerned with general descriptions, patterns and outcomes rather than the specific identification of individuals. It was also stressed that participation was voluntary. In the smaller qualitative sample the researcher wrote to the individual residential workers to seek their agreement to be interviewed and every effort was made to ensure their anonymity as well as that of the young people.

Organisation of the Fieldwork

Fieldwork was planned on a five-stage basis. In the first stage, data concerning the young people's family circumstances, care history and education history were to be gathered. These data were obtained from existing case records and entered into the data schedule by the key residential care workers.

The second stage of the study (the 'pre-test' stage) required the Young People's Centres to be randomly allocated to an 'intervention' group and a 'comparison' group. For this stage data were to be gathered on the educational variables (attendance, behaviour and attainment) from the young people's end-of-year school reports prior to the period of the study. The 'pre-test' stage was therefore planned to draw on the school reports for the school year ending June 1996.

The third stage (the 'Intervention' stage) occurred during the school year August 1996 - June 1997. During this period, residential workers were required to use the amended and extracted education component of the Looking After Children Assessment and Action Records (Appendix 2) in their work with the young people in the intervention group. This required them to complete the detailed assessment schedules regarding the children's educational situation at the beginning of the study period and to establish action plans which would address any areas of need that had been identified. At this stage workers were asked to take responsibility for progressing each aspect of the plan. Workers were then asked to review the assessment schedules at the end of the intervention period and to note the benefits and drawbacks associated with the method as well as their views about the impact of the materials on the young people's education.

The fourth stage (the 'post-test' stage) was planned to occur during the summer of the ensuing school year, that is, from June to August 1997, when the end of year school report was available. As with stage two, data were to be collected concerning the attendance, achievements and behaviour of the young people in the sample. These data would serve to provide comparative details on the educational progress of those young people who had received the intervention and those who had not.

The fifth stage of data collection then followed. This involved an examination of the process that had occurred during the intervention period by obtaining information about the experiences, attitudes and feelings of those staff that had used the LAC materials. This final stage was undertaken during the period September 1997 – January 1998 and entailed semi-structured qualitative interviews (see interview

schedule – Appendix 3). Specifically, these interviews sought to obtain the workers' views about the materials' value in assessing, planning and reviewing the educational arrangements of the young people in question. Another aim of the interviews was to establish if the workers felt that practice arrangements with schools and education professionals had improved through use of the materials.

Conduct of the Research

The potential for a study of the educational experiences of young people in residential care was initially explored in a number of meetings with senior managers of the Departments of Social Work and Education in the study authority. The proposed work built upon relationships that had already been established during an earlier investigation which had been funded by that city council. Following the agreement of both departments, the initial stages of the research fieldwork commenced, as planned, in August 1996.

At that point, 53 'looked after' young people were being accommodated in a total of eight Young Peoples Centres (YPC's) in the authority area. Young People's Centres are small-scale, neighbourhood-based, local authority residential child-care units accommodating small, mixed-gender groups of 5 to 8 young people. Young people reside in the YPCs either on a voluntary basis, with the agreement of their parents, or on compulsory orders through the Children's Panel or the Courts. They are normally enrolled in mainstream day schools.

The broad policy of the study authority is to place young people as close to their own communities as possible (wherever appropriate). However, young people are often placed in YPCs away from their own neighbourhoods as a consequence either of emergency or unplanned admissions or because of a shortfall in locally based provision. Thus the placement of young people in the YPCs was largely a random process.

Prior to the start of the investigation, the researcher visited each of the residential units involved in the study and the details of the proposed research, including the design, methodology and aims, were explained to the staff teams at their routine weekly staff meetings.

It was made clear that although the Looking After Children materials were not to be used with the young people in the comparison group, these young people were nevertheless to continue receiving the same social work and education service that they would have been given in normal circumstances so that, bearing in mind the ethical considerations discussed above, they would not be disadvantaged by the study.

At the time the fieldwork was undertaken, social work services in the city were managed and delivered through four geographically defined Districts. Each District had two Young People's Centres within its designated geographical area. Of these, one YPC from each district was randomly selected (using the toss of a coin) and the residents in these four units designated as the 'Intervention Group'. The YPC's in question were labelled A,B,C,&D. The residents in the remaining four centres; W,X,Y&Z, became the designated 'Comparison Group'. During the initial preparatory stages of the research, managers and staff in all eight of the YPCs indicated that they were willing to be involved in the research. Thus there was an even number of Intervention and Comparison YPCs at the outset of the study.

All of the young people in the YPC's were regarded as *potential* subjects at this stage since the necessary permissions were still to be sought from them and their parents (where relevant) for their inclusion in the investigation.

The total number of young people in the Intervention Group of YPCs was 25 while the Comparison Group of YPCs had a total of 28 residents. Though it was not possible to allocate the individual subjects randomly, the groups of units shared several characteristics and were therefore matched in a number of respects. For example, the age and gender profile of the resident groups and the reasons for their

placement were similar. Furthermore, all of the YPCs were subject to the same general policies and procedures as they were all within the same local authority area. All the units were similar in size and they were externally line-managed by the same Service Provision Manager. Finally, there were no distinct practices in relation to the children's schooling on the part of any of the units. Therefore, while the circumstances of the proposed investigation made it impossible to achieve equivalence, there was a degree of similarity which approximated equivalency.

Table 3

YPC Total Population and Gender Distribution at Outset of Study

YPC	*No. of Male Residents*	*No .of Female Residents*	*Total No. of Young People*
A	4	3	7
B	3	3	6
C	2	3	5
D	3	4	7
W	4	2	6
X	4	2	6
Y	2	6	8
Z	5	3	8
Total	27	26	53

As shown in Table 3 the gender balance for the YPC population as a whole was even, with 27 males and 26 females. However, given the random selection process of the two sub-groups it was not possible to guarantee a completely even gender balance in both groups. The number of females resident in the Intervention Group of YPC's was therefore slightly greater than the number of males (14F, 11M) and there were slightly more males than females in the Comparison Group of YPC's (15M, 13F). The difference between both sub-groups was, however, minimal and it was not considered that this would greatly affect the study findings.

Emerging Difficulties

As work began on the study a number of difficulties began to emerge. These ultimately fell into three specific areas. The first of these related to the distribution and balance of intervention and comparison sub-groups. Unfortunately, due to staffing problems (long-term absence of their unit manager), staff in one of the designated intervention units (Unit B) felt unable to continue to offer their co-operation and decided to withdraw from the study. This decision had an impact both on the number of young people in the study population as a whole and on the balance of designated Intervention YPC's to Comparison YPC's.

After the withdrawal of YPC 'B', the number of Young Peoples Centres in the study was reduced to 7 resulting in 3 YPCs remaining in the Intervention Sub-Group and 4 YPCs in the Comparison Sub-Group. Six young people were resident in YPC 'B' at the time of the decision to withdraw from the research. Consequently, the investigation had to proceed with a revised population of 47 young people. The gender distribution of the six residents in YPC 'B' was split evenly, 3 male and 3 female, thus their withdrawal did not affect the overall ratio of male to female residents.

Letters were then sent to all of the parents and the 47 young people that comprised the remaining YPC population. Thirty young people subsequently agreed to take part in the research. Thus, the study sample (n=30) represented 64% of the population (n=47) of young people in the remaining 7 YPCs.

The withdrawal of YPC 'B' from the study resulted in one less Intervention YPC to Comparison YPCs and so there was also a resultant reduction in the number of young people in the intervention group. Consequently, with a ratio of 2:1 young people in the Comparison Group to the Intervention Group, the latter comprised only one third of the total study sample.

Further difficulties were subsequently encountered when returns for two of the young people in the Intervention Sub-Group were not made. Effectively, this reduced the number of young people in the study even further (to 28) and, more significantly, reduced the number of participants in the Intervention Sub-Group to eight.

The second area of difficulty that emerged related to the reliability and detail of the data that was held in the young people's case records – not only with regard to their family circumstances and care histories but also in respect of their educational experiences. As will be described in the next chapters (which give detailed analyses of these data) it soon became apparent that all of the data sought for the purposes of the study were not routinely held on all of the young peoples case records. In some cases this difficulty amounted to occasional gaps in information (which had little overall impact on the study findings) but in several instances there were substantial gaps in the records and it proved difficult in these cases to examine their experiences in detail.

As stated earlier, this was not entirely unanticipated as previous work, (Francis *et al.*, 1996), had found similar difficulties in accessing full and reliable data from records. This is also a matter of concern that has been commented on more recently (e.g. Brodie, 2001: Farmer and Pollock, 1998; HMI/SWSI, 2001) indicating that this may be an inherent feature of research with young people in public care.

As it was the intention of the researcher to investigate the quality of the recorded information used in practice as a basis for decision-making, the absence of detailed information in many cases served to confirm that record keeping is a major issue of concern for young people in public care. Indeed, the experience of this researcher suggests that incomplete and insubstantial records are possibly a contributory factor to the young people's educational difficulties rather than simply symptomatic of their disrupted care arrangements.

The third major difficulty that was encountered had the most significant impact on the study as a whole and ultimately altered the nature of the research outcomes. One

of the main aims of the study was to evaluate the impact of the LAC materials on the education of the group of young people concerned and the design was partly based upon the assumption that pre-test, post-test comparisons could be made using the end-of-year school reports for the whole study sample. While it was anticipated that there may be some difficulty in accessing data on a small proportion of the sample, this, in fact, proved to be a considerable underestimation of the problem and it was only possible to obtain school reports for six of the twenty-eight young people - this despite contacting each of the residential units and asking them to obtain copies of the reports from the schools.

In one case the head of school was reluctant to furnish the report for the research, even though the education authority had given clearance. However, the main problem stemmed from the other schools' inability to track down these records. Part of the problem, it seems, was due to the young people's chaotic circumstances. The system of school record keeping for looked after children was not sufficiently rigorous to ensure that their records followed them when changes in their care placements occurred and these moves resulted in changes in their school arrangements. The problem was also greatly exacerbated by the young people's record of poor attendance, high rates of exclusion and frequent changes in home and school circumstances. The researcher met with the manager of the outreach teaching team for looked after children to attempt to resolve the problem and she agreed to try to obtain the young people's school reports. Unfortunately this also proved a futile exercise and she was unable to trace the outstanding records.

The researcher's expectations at the outset of the research were based on the belief that, despite the anticipated absence of some of the school records, this stage of data collection would be relatively straightforward since the approach adopted was designed not to be unwieldy or overly complicated. However, the inability to access full and reliable school records for the majority of the young people, proved to be a major obstacle. Given these problems, the planned quasi-experimental design ultimately proved unworkable and the intention to evaluate the impact of the LAC

materials on the educational performance of the study group was therefore abandoned (after much deliberation) at a later stage in the investigation.

One of the aims of the study was to identify the extent to which existing records could be used as a reliable basis for planning effective intervention with the young people. Finding that there were major gaps in the care records of many of the young people and that there were no available school records for the majority of them served, at an early stage, to illustrate a highly significant problem in the structural arrangements of their care and education.

An insurmountable obstacle therefore confronted one aspect of the study and though this was unfortunate because it prevented one part of the research from proceeding, it is nevertheless important as it demonstrates that such problems, unless addressed through policy and practice, may hamper the effective implementation of the LAC materials. As reported later in the findings chapters, one of the major concerns of the residential care staff in this study is that the materials will be unworkable because so many young people are excluded from school or have chaotic lives which result in problems ensuring that there are proper records.

Continuation of the Study

Despite the problems described above, work had continued on other aspects of the research. Data were gathered from the young people's case records and designated staff in the residential units had begun using the AAR materials in their work with the young people. These stages of the investigation were therefore progressing as planned. Following a period of reflection and uncertainty about the aims of the study, it became apparent that key data had been collected in these phases of the research which would allow the researcher to address the other aims of the study in more depth than had originally been planned.

Notwithstanding the shortcomings of the record-keeping systems, important data concerning the backgrounds, characteristics and experiences of the study group had

been gathered in the course of the fieldwork. These data related both to the young people's care experiences and to their education experiences and they provided valuable insight into the relationship between these two domains. Moreover, data obtained from the interviews with residential care staff provided important information about the policy and practice implications of using the LAC materials.

All of the interviews took place in private rooms in the respondents' workplace. The interviews were tape-recorded and the data subsequently fully transcribed. Despite the preparations and lessons learned from the pilot exercise, children's homes are, by their nature, extremely busy places and in some instances the interviews were disrupted by telephone calls or interruptions by other staff members. Thus the quality of the recordings was often adversely affected and the detail of the interview content was varied. Despite the limitations imposed by the circumstances, however, the interviews produced detailed information which was useful for qualitative analysis purposes.

These data were analysed manually rather than by using one of the available computer packages. There were two main reasons for deciding this. First, the number of people interviewed was small and so the quantity of material to be analysed was not particularly onerous. Second, it has been suggested that using computer packages, whilst aiding the management and retrieval of information, can distance the researcher from the data (Brodie, 2001) and that none of these packages are capable of the intellectual and conceptualising processes required to transform data into meaningful findings (Thorne, 2000) In this case, I felt that manual analysis of the data gave me a deeper appreciation of the issues addressed by the research. A problem associated with this is that the effect of interpretation on the part of the researcher can be increased. However, it must also be recognised that qualitative data is never easy to analyse without a process of interpretation on the part of the investigator and it was felt that the benefits in this instance outweighed the possible costs.

Method and Process of Data Analysis

The conceptual framework used for collection, organisation and thematic analysis of the data was developed from the categorisation of several key themes that corresponded both to theoretical knowledge of the topic of study and to the objectives of the LAC materials. Thus, for example, categories such as, 'family backgrounds'; 'pre-care educational experiences'; 'care histories'; 'placement stability'; and 'transitions to secondary school', corresponded with theoretical explanations for the poor level of educational attainment among looked after children. Categories such as, 'co-ordinating the education arrangements of looked after children'; 'engaging parents in discussions about their child's educational needs'; and 'clarifying the roles and responsibilities of professionals', corresponded to the stated aims of the LAC materials. The conceptual framework used was therefore developed as a means of both clarifying the main areas to be studied and as a method of organising the analysis of key factors, constructs and variables (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Data were obtained from secondary sources (social work and school records) and from semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Both deductive and inductive reasoning processes were then used to interpret and structure the meanings that were derived from the data. Deductive reasoning begins with the idea and uses the data to confirm or negate the idea. In this way data analysis is directed from the hypotheses or explicit study questions (Thorne, 2000). This approach was used to explore and analyse theoretical explanations of phenomena such as 'social background' and 'placement stability'. Similarly, data from the transcribed interviews were organised systematically (using categories derived from the conceptual framework and a cross-case analysis) to compare the cases in order to detect commonalities and variations among and between the patterns of experiences of the respondents in areas such as their training and preparation (Byrne, 2001). This aspect of the thematic analysis involved identifying all data that related to the already classified patterns (Aronson, 1994) and bringing them together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience (Leininger, 1985).

Summary

Although it had become apparent that an evaluation of the impact of the LAC materials on the educational outcomes of the young people was no longer viable, the focus of analysis in relation to the other aims of the study remained intact. These related to the factors and circumstances affecting the educational progress of the young people and the experiences and views of staff engaged in the process of using the LAC materials in practice. Though it was regretful that one aspect of the study had proved unworkable, the investigation proceeded in a pragmatic manner. It has been suggested that a pragmatic approach is necessary in social work research because of the diversity and complexity one is often confronted with but that such pragmatism demands rigour and attention to what can and cannot be achieved in any one study (Cheetham et al, 1997). This philosophy underlined the approach that led to the completion of the study.

Ultimately, given the small sample involved in the study, it is recognised that it is not possible to generalise the findings but nevertheless, when combined with the body of emerging research, they add to our knowledge and understanding of this field. It has been suggested that this is a field in which there is still a great deal of uncertainty and where there are considerable gaps in knowledge. Thus, it is argued, it is important to make use of the best research of any kind which sheds further light on the subject (Jackson and Thomas, 2000). A model of the different stages in the development of research in any field (Quinton et al, 1997) suggests that a stage is usually reached where a variety of small-scale descriptive studies are undertaken and used in the argument for change in policy and practice. It is only when the need for more reliable information is accepted that the next stage is achieved and more substantial funding is provided for larger, more representative studies. Jackson and Sachdev (2001) suggest that research on the education of children in public care has reached the former stage but has not yet reached the latter stage. It is suggested that the findings detailed in the following chapters might usefully add to the momentum that has already been achieved and serve as a basis for more refined research in the future.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILY BACKGROUNDS

Introduction

The previous chapter described the theoretical and methodological background to the research and explained how the research was conducted. This chapter begins the process of analysing the data obtained by the investigation and provides an historical and biographical overview of the young people in the study. The general information presented here provides an important backcloth to the more detailed analysis and discussion of the educational experiences of the group, which follows in the next chapter. As the methodology chapter has previously explained, the data presented here draws on information held by the residential key-workers in the young people's case records. This method of data collection highlighted many shortcomings concerning the amount of detailed information held in social work files and so, many aspects of the histories of the young people had to be labelled 'unknown'.

As with others that have investigated the experiences of children in public care (e.g. Berridge and Brodie, 1998; Berridge *et al.,* 1997; Brodie, 2001; Fletcher-Campbell and Hall, 1990) the writer has presented as full an account as possible while acknowledging that the detail and quality of the information varies greatly across the sample. Notwithstanding these difficulties, data concerning the general descriptive characteristics and family backgrounds of the young people in the study sample are first presented. The reasons for social work intervention and aspects of their care histories and current care placements are then examined. Finally, the main issues arising from the data are summarised.

General Characteristics

Age, Gender and Ethnicity Profile

While the twenty-eight young people in the sample were in many ways a diverse group, they nevertheless shared many of the characteristics that other studies have identified as being common to young people in residential care (e.g Berridge and Brodie, 1998). For example, as Figure 3 shows, the age range of the young people in the study was 13-16 years. Half of the group were aged 15 years and a quarter were 14 years old. Of the remaining seven, four (14%, n=28) were 16 years old and three (11%, n=28) were 13 years old. This age range and distribution is typical of the age group of young people currently in residential care in Scotland (Scottish Executive Statistical Bulletin, 2003).

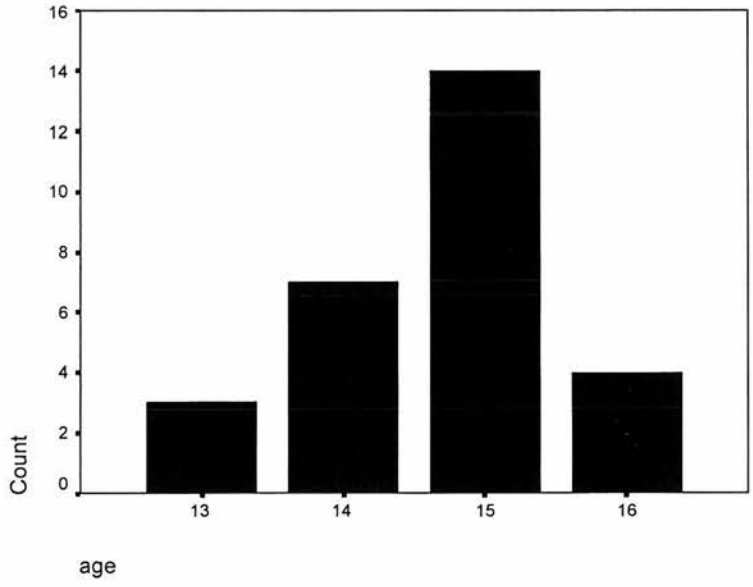


Figure 3. Age Distribution of Young People in Study Sample

Although the age distribution resembles the wider picture for young people in residential care in Scotland, the ratio of girls to boys in this sample was different to that for the country as a whole. Whereas boys generally greatly outnumber girls in

the residential care population, the gender ratio for this study was 2:1 girls to boys, with nineteen girls (68%, n=28) and nine boys (32%, n=28).

Nine girls and five boys were aged 15 years and two girls and one boy were aged 13 years. Thus, for these age groups, the gender ratio of 2:1 girls to boys mirrors the gender ratio for the study sample as a whole. There were four girls aged 14 years and three boys of the same age. There were also four girls aged 16 years in the sample but there were no boys of this age. (See Table 4)

Table 4

Gender and Age Distribution of Young People in Sample

Age	***Gender***		***Total***
	Boys	Girls	
13	1	2	3
14	3	4	7
15	5	9	14
16	0	4	4
Total	**9**	**19**	**28**

All of the young people in the study were reported to be white European. At present it is not possible to give a breakdown of the ethnic origins of children in the residential care population as a whole (since data provided by the Scottish Executive do not include this level of detail) but, currently, 1.5% of the total looked after population in Scotland are from minority ethnic backgrounds (Scottish Executive, CLA statistics, 2003).

Health, Physical, Intellectual and Psychological Characteristics

Respondents were asked to indicate whether the young people in the sample had any chronic health problems, learning disabilities, physical disabilities or psychological problems. They were asked to tick 'yes' to psychological problems if there had been

previous 'formal' contact with an educational psychologist, clinical psychologist or psychiatrist, or if there was any record of attendance by the young person at the Department of Child and Family Psychiatry.

As will be seen from the data in Table 5, there is an absence of important information about aspects of some of the young people's physical, intellectual and psychological well-being. While perhaps relating only to a small number of the group, nevertheless it reflects some of the concerns expressed elsewhere (Parker *et al*, 1991) about failures within the care system to provide care that is equivalent to that which is provided by 'good parents'. The main concerns identified by Parker and his colleagues (ibid) were that a lack of accurate information about important areas of young people's lives made it difficult, if not impossible, to assess their needs effectively and, in turn, develop appropriate plans for their care. It was these concerns that first gave rise to the Looking After Children materials.

Table 5

Health, Learning, Physical and Psychological Issues

	Yes	*No*	*Not Known*	*Total*
Chronic Health Problems	0	27	1	28
Learning Disabilities	0	26	2	28
Physical Disabilities	0	27	1	28
Psychological Problems	4	18	6	28

As with many of the questions in the schedule, respondents indicated that they were unable to provide some of the required data and there were six cases where respondents reported that it was 'not known' if the young people had 'formal' psychological difficulties. Similarly, in one case in each of the categories relating to health and physical disability, it was not known if there were any concerns and it was not known whether two of the young people had learning disabilities (see Table 5).

None of the young people were reported to have any difficulties regarding chronic health problems, physical disabilities or learning disabilities. However, four of the group were said to have psychological problems - a relatively high proportion and an indication, as will be discussed later, of the difficult backgrounds of the young people. In fact, this figure may well be an underestimate as carers were frequently unclear about the details of previous contacts with other agencies.

From the available data, girls in the study sample were more likely to have been formally referred for psychological support than the boys. While the ratio of girls to boys in the whole study sample was 2:1, the ratio of young people with recorded psychological issues was slightly higher at 3:1 girls to boys. Interestingly, although half of the young people in the study sample were aged fifteen years, only one of the four young people that were reported to have psychological problems was this age. Two others (one boy and one girl) were aged fourteen years and the other, also a girl, was aged sixteen years.

Not surprisingly, there appeared to be a link between those young people who had been referred for psychological services and those who were experiencing difficulties at school. Two of this group of four young people, both girls, were temporarily excluded from school during the study school year and one of these two girls was later permanently excluded in the same school year. Another of these four young people was first referred to the social work department because of 'failure to attend school'. Thus three of the four young people reported to have psychological difficulties were not attending school on a regular basis. Furthermore, all four of the young people who were reported to have psychological problems were also said to have special education arrangements. These and other data concerning the educational arrangements and experiences of the group are discussed in chapter seven.

Family Backgrounds

As with other studies that have examined the backgrounds of children in public care (e.g. Bebbington and Miles, 1989; Berridge and Brodie, 1998) the family circumstances of the young people reported here were characterised by disruption, social exclusion, disadvantage, abuse, lone-parenthood and family relationship problems.

Type of household

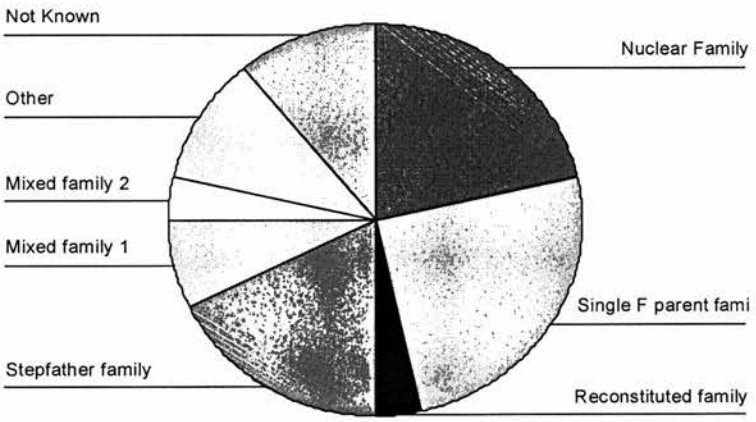


Figure 4.

Key:

Nuclear family	=	Both birth parents
Single female parent family	=	Lone mother
Single male parent family	=	Lone father
Reconstituted family	=	Mother + child(ren) and father + child(ren)
Stepfather family	=	Mother + child(ren) and stepfather/cohabitee
Stepmother family	=	Father + child(ren) and stepmother/cohabitee
Mixed family 1	=	Mother + child(ren) and stepfather/cohab + joint child(ren))
Mixed family 2	=	Father + child(ren) and stepmother/cohab + joint children)

The data provided evidence of considerable levels of family disruption. Almost one-third (32%, n=28) of the young people in the study came from families that were reconfigured, that is, various types of family composition where parents had re-married or formed new households with other partners and their children. One-quarter of the young people (25%, n=28) were from lone parent families (though none of these were lone fathers) and only one-fifth (21%, n=28) came from nuclear-family households, that is, where both birth parents were living at home. Further definition of these categories is given in the key provided with Figure 4.

In five cases (18%, n=28), of which four were girls, the young people lived in households that included step-fathers. In six cases (21%, n=28) the type of household the young people came from was either not known or uncertain. While the majority of the young people's mothers were living at home, by contrast, the birth fathers of the majority were living away from the family.

There was further evidence of family disruption with eight cases (29%, n=28) where the young people had brothers or sisters living away from the family though, of these, only one had a sibling who was being looked after by the local authority. In three instances the other siblings were living with their father. In two cases the siblings had moved to their own homes and in a further two cases it was not known to where the siblings had moved.

Family Accommodation

The accommodation circumstances of each of the young people (that is the type of housing that their families lived in) were examined. Fourteen (50%, n=28) lived in rented accommodation, either local authority, housing association or private rented. Nine (32%, n=28) of the young people's families lived in owner-occupied homes. Surprisingly, in five cases (18%, n=28) the type of accommodation the young person's family lived in was reported as not known, yet again reflecting the lack of detailed information held by residential care workers. Details of the families' living arrangements are provided in Table 6. The majority (two-thirds) of the six nuclear

family households lived in owner-occupied homes compared with one-third of the nine reconfigured families and just one-quarter of the seven lone parent families.

Table 6

Type of Family Accommodation

Type of Accommodation	*Frequency*	*Percentage*
Local Authority Rented	10	35.7
Owner Occupied	9	32.1
Housing Association	3	10.7
Private Rented	1	3.6
Not Known	5	17.9
Total	28	100.0

Financial Circumstances

Respondents were asked to provide details of the families' financial circumstances, in particular, the source of the families' incomes, how much income they received and whether they had any financial difficulties.

Eleven (39%, n=28) families were dependent on state benefits as their main source of income. Of these, nine were reconfigured or lone parent families. In nine cases (32%, n=28) the source of family income was not known to the key-workers.

Eight families (fewer than one third of the families in the study) were able to rely on a wage earner for their main source of income. Notably, however, of these eight families, six had two wage-earning adults in the household and two of these were nuclear families. One lone parent family was said to have two wage earners, possibly a working sibling (see Table 7).

Table 7

Source of Family Income

Income Source	Number of Families	Percentage
Wage (1 parent)	2	7.1
Wage (2 parents)	6	21.4
State Benefits	11	39.3
Not Known	9	32.1
Total	28	100.0

Just three families (10%, n=28) were said not to have any financial problems while five of the families (18%, n=28) were reported to have moderate or severe financial difficulties. In the majority of cases (68% n=28) residential care staff were unable to state whether the families of the young people had any financial problems or not. Indeed in twenty-seven returns (96% n=28) the workers had no knowledge of the level of family income for the young people in their care.

Initial Social Work Involvement with the Young People

Information was sought about the age that young people in the study were first referred to the social work department, the reason(s) that they were referred and who initiated the referral. It was hoped that such data would illuminate whether concerns about school or other educational matters had been identified at an earlier stage in the young person's life and also whether education authorities were instrumental in initiating early intervention by social work services.

Age at First Referral to Social Work

In those cases where it was known, the majority of the group were first referred to social work when they were secondary school aged. Two were twelve years of age, seven (25%, n=28) were thirteen years and three (11%, n=28) were fourteen years old. Five young people (18%, n=28) were first referred when they were less than twelve years of age. Of these, one young person was referred at the age of six years,

one was seven years old and two were aged nine. The seven year old and one of the nine year olds were referred solely because of failure to attend school, as was one of the twelve year olds. Another, also aged twelve, was referred for reasons that included failure to attend school.

In eleven cases (39%, n=28) the key-workers were unable to ascertain from the case records what age the young person was when they were first referred to the social work department. This again suggests either, that carers do not routinely obtain important background information about the young people in their care or, as Brodie (2001) suggests, that one of the consequences of having complex and disrupted care histories is that important information is lost along the way. Table 8 gives a breakdown of the ages of the young people at first referral to social work.

Table 8

Age at First Referral to Social Work

Age of Young Person	*Frequency*	*Percentage*
6 years	1	3.6
7 years	1	3.6
9 years	2	7.1
11 years	1	3.6
12 years	2	7.1
13 years	7	25.0
14 years	3	10.7
Not Known	11	39.3
Total	28	100.0

Reason for first referral

There were a variety of reasons why young people in the study were first referred to the social work department and, while some were referred for a single reason, in most instances they were referred because of multiple concerns. It is difficult to

encapsulate the complexity of the circumstances and factors that preceded their involvement with social work but the following data highlight the frequency with which factors were cited.

Family relationship problems, particularly difficult relationships between parents and their children, were predominant among the reasons recorded for first social work involvement. For example, thirteen (46%, n=28), of the young people were said to be 'outwith parental control' at the point of first referral. This was the most common factor cited in all of the initial referrals to social work, with more than half of the boys (five out of nine) falling into this category and also almost half of the girls (eight out of nineteen). Other research into the circumstances of children in residential care (Berridge and Brodie, 1998; Brodie, 2001; Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998) has also shown that difficulties in family relationships are key issues, especially for adolescents

Family stress and the break-up of families has also been a significant antecedent in other studies (Brodie, 2001; Francis *et al.,* 1996). Here, in eleven cases (39%, n=28) 'family breakdown' (that is, families splitting up) was cited as the reason for involving social work, making this the second most common factor given for referral. Nine girls were included in this category but only two boys.

Alongside concerns about relationship difficulties within their families, concerns were also expressed in the initial referrals about the safety and well-being of a number of the children. For example, 'lack of parental care' was cited as a concern in five (18%, n=28) of the referrals (one boy and 4 girls). 'Physical abuse' was given as a reason in five cases, 'sexual abuse' was indicated in the referrals of three of the young people and 'emotional abuse' was cited in two cases. All of those who were referred because of concerns about physical, sexual or emotional abuse were girls.

Besides the problems that young people and their families were experiencing within the context of the family home, significant difficulties within the school context were also apparent. 'Failure to attend school' was included among the reasons given for

the referrals of ten (36%, n=28) of the young people in the sample and in three of these cases (2 girls and 1 boy) 'failing to attend school' was the sole reason that the young person was referred to the social work department. Of the ten referrals that included failure to attend school, six were girls and four were boys.

Finally, 'committing offences' was included in the reasons for the referral of only two young people, one boy and one girl. The reason for initial referral was not known in three cases. Details of these data are provided in Table 9 below.

Table 9

Reason for Initial Referral to Social Work

Reason for Referral	*Frequency*	*Percentage*
Outwith Parental Control	13	46%
Family Breakdown	11	39%
Failure to Attend School	10	36%
Lack of Parental Care	5	18%
Physical Abuse	5	18%
Sexual Abuse	3	11%
Emotional Abuse	2	7%
Offences	2	7%
Not Known	3	11%

(It should be noted that multiple issues were intimated in the referrals of several cases thus the total number of factors included in the data is greater than the number of young people in the study group).

Source of Initial Referral

More than half of the young people in the study, eleven girls and four boys, were first referred for social work intervention by their parents or relatives (53%, n=28). Nine of the young people (32.5%, n=28) were initially referred by their mother

while, in two other instances, (7%, n=28) it was the father of the young person who made the referral. In another case both parents referred the young person concerned. Other members of the young person's family made the first referral for three (11%, n=28) of the young people. Of these fifteen young people, subsequent placement in care was made under voluntary arrangements for the majority while three were placed in their first placement under compulsory measures (section 44(1)(b) Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968).

Table 10

Source of Initial Referral to Social Work Department

Source of Referral	*Frequency*	*Percentage*
Mother	9	32.1
Father	2	7.1
Both Parents	1	3.6
Other Relative	3	10.7
School	4	14.3
Police	1	3.6
Reporter	1	3.6
Other	2	7.1
Not Known	5	17.9
Total	28	100%

The concerns and issues that parents and other family members cited when referring young people were very varied and included, 'lack of parental care', 'outwith parental control', 'family breakdown' and 'failure to attend school'.

Next to family members, the most common source of initial referral was the education department, with four of the young people, three girls and one boy, (14%, n=28) being referred to the social work department by their schools. One of these young people was subsequently first placed in care under a supervision order (section 44(1)(b) Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968). Not surprisingly, three of the four referrals that schools made related to non-attendance. Two of these referrals cited

'failure to attend school' as the sole reason for concern, one included 'failure to attend school' among other reasons, and one was because of 'physical abuse'. However, of the ten referrals that expressed concern about non-attendance at school, only these three came from schools.

The police and the Reporter to the Children's Hearings referred one young person each and, of these two referrals, one included 'failure to attend school'. The source of initial referral was not known in five cases (18%, n=28) and was reported as 'other' in two instances. These data are illustrated in Table 10.

Previous Care Histories

Twenty (70%, n=28) of the young people in the sample had at least one other care placement prior to their current placement. One of these young people had previously been looked after away from home in six different placements. Another had four previous placements while two others had three earlier care episodes and four had been looked after in two prior placements. Six of the young people in the study had no previous history of care and were therefore placed in their current residential placements at first admission, reflecting a general tendency for older children to be placed in residential provision at first placement. In two cases it was not known if there was a history of earlier care episodes.

Details of their earlier care placements show that slightly more than half (55% n=20) of the twenty young people who had at least one previous placement were first placed in family settings, with either foster carers or community carers. Eight (40%, n=20) were first placed in residential settings. Similarly, for those who had been looked after on at least two earlier occasions, five (63%, n=8) were placed with families in their second placement while three (37%, n=8) were in residential placements. The young person who had six previous care episodes had been placed in foster care on five occasions and in a residential unit on one occasion.

Nine (45%, n=20) of the twenty 'first placements' were emergency admissions. Eight of these were girls. Of the six (30%, n=20) planned placements, three were girls and

three were boys. The type of first admission to care was unknown for five (25%, n=20) of these placements.

More than half of the first placements (55%, n=20) were made under voluntary arrangements (section 15 Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968). Nine of these eleven placements were girls. Four (20%, n=20) (three girls and one boy) were first placed under compulsory supervision orders (section 44(1)(b) Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968). Details of the legal basis for placement were not available in five (25%, n=20) cases.

For those eight who had a second previous placement, four were placed on a voluntary basis, three girls and one boy, while one girl and one boy were placed under compulsory supervision orders. Details were unknown for the other two of these eight young people.

There were a variety of reasons given for the first care placement. Seven (35%, n=20) young people, four girls and three boys, were said to be 'outwith parental control' and five (25%, n=20), all girls, were placed because of 'family breakdown'. One young person became looked after because of 'failure to attend school' and one other was removed from the family because of physical abuse. The reason that eight (40%, n=20) of the young people first became looked after by the local authority was reported as not known.

Four (20%, n=20) of the youngsters remained in their first care placement for 1-2 years. Seven (35%, n=20) were looked after in the first placement for 6-12 months, three (15%, n=20) were placed for 3-6 months and six (30%, n=20) remained for 3 months or less.

In their second placement, three of the eight young people concerned stayed for 3 months or less while five remained in placement for 6-12 months. The young person who had been placed on six occasions remained for less than 3 months in four of these placements, for 3-6 months in one and for less than one year in the other.

Current Placement Details

As with the details of their previous care histories, data were sought on the current placement arrangements for the young people (that is, their placement at the time of the study). Specifically, information was obtained about the age that the young people were admitted to their placements; the legal basis of, and reasons for, the placements; whether the placements were made on a planned or emergency basis; and where the young people were living prior to being placed.

Age admitted to current placement

Almost three-quarters of the group (71%, n=28) were placed in their present placement at the ages of 14 or 15 years. Eleven (39%, n=28), five girls and six boys, were aged 14 years. Nine (32%, n=28), all girls, were aged 15 years. A further six (21%, n=28), four girls and two boys, were aged 13 years when they were placed and one girl was 12 years old. The age that one young person was placed was not known.

Legal basis of placement

Fourteen young people (50%, n=28), ten girls and four boys, were placed under compulsory supervision orders (section 44(1)(b), Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968). Ten (36%, n=28), seven girls and three boys, were placed under voluntary arrangements (section 15 Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968). In four cases the legal basis of the placement was unknown. Seven of the fifteen young people who were first referred by their families were placed in their current placement under compulsory measures compared with just three of these who were so placed at first placement. Similarly, three of the four school referrals were placed under compulsory orders compared with only one at first placement. These data indicate an increasing use of compulsory measures as the young people's care careers progressed.

Reason for placement

As with the reasons for initial referral to the social work department, the causes cited for young people's current placement were varied. 'Family breakdown' was noted as the most common reason and this applied to eight girls and two boys (36%, n=28) in the group. The second most likely reason for placement was 'outwith parental control' which applied to eight (28.5%, n=28) young people, four girls and four boys.

School difficulties were recorded as the sole cause of placement in three (11%, n=28) cases, with two of these youngsters, one boy and one girl, 'failing to attend school' while the other, a girl, was 'excluded from school'. Failure to attend school was included, among other reasons, for one girl being placed. 'Breakdown of the previous placement' was given as the reason for the current placement of three girls and one boy (14%, n=28), though no explanation of the cause of the placement disruption was given. One girl was placed due to suffering from a 'lack of parental care' and in one other case, a boy, the reason for placement was unknown.

Planned or emergency admission

Two-thirds of the current placements were unplanned with eighteen (64%, n=28) of the young people, eleven girls and seven boys, placed in their current placement as a consequence of emergency arrangements. Eight (28%, n=28) placements, seven girls and one boy, were planned and in the cases of one girl and one boy, it was not known whether the placement was made on a planned or emergency basis.

Living arrangements prior to current placement

Almost half of the group (thirteen) were in other types of care placements before being placed in their present setting. Of these, two girls and three boys were living with Community Carers (specialist foster carers recruited to offer placements to adolescents), four girls were with foster carers and four girls were placed in other residential settings.

A relatively small proportion of the group, five girls and four boys (32%, n=28), were admitted to placements from their own homes and three others (11%, n=28), two girls and a boy, were living with relatives immediately prior to admission. In two cases the young people were living in other forms of accommodation and in one instance the living arrangements of the young person before placement were not known.

Summary

- The method of data collection used in this study highlighted an apparent lack of basic, essential information in many of the young people's care records. Those involved in the day-to-day care of the young people (residential key workers) were asked to provide information for the study from their records and in many instances they were unable to furnish details, not only of the backgrounds and histories of the young people, but also of their current circumstances, such as their schooling or home circumstances.

- Where information was available it showed that the young people in this study shared many of the problematic characteristics that are common to young people in residential care in general (see for example, Brodie, 2001; Berridge and Brodie, 1998). Indeed, as has been remarked elsewhere (Gooch, 1996) the intractable problems that were apparent in the findings reported here are now more typical of the core of young people who occupy residential care than previously.

- While their general physical health and learning abilities appeared to be good, a relatively high proportion had been formally referred for psychological services and many others had demonstrated behavioural and relationship difficulties prior to their current care episode. Where young people had been referred for support from psychological services, there were also indications that these young people were experiencing problems at school.

- The family backgrounds and circumstances of the young people were similar to those identified in other studies of young people in public care (e.g. Bebbington and Miles, 1989; Berridge and Brodie, 1998). Only one-fifth of the group were living with both their birth parents. A high proportion lived in reconfigured families and one-quarter lived in lone-parent families, none of which were lone fathers. Dennis and Erdos (1982) claim that lack of a stable family background, particularly the absence of fathers from the family home, is linked to the weakening of families and thus to environments that do not give children a positive educational experience.

- The majority of the families lived in rented accommodation and a substantial number were reliant on welfare benefits as their sole source of income. Those families where both birth parents were present were more likely to be living in owner-occupied accommodation and to have wage earners living in the household. In more than two-thirds of the cases, residential care staff were unable to say whether the families were experiencing financial difficulties or not.

- Few of the young people in the study had come to the attention of the social work department before they reached secondary school age. However, two of the five who were primary school aged at first referral were referred because of failure to attend school.

- The circumstances leading to the young people's referral to the social work department were usually complex and most were referred because of multiple concerns rather than single issues. As with other studies findings (Berridge and Brodie, 1998; Brodie, 2001; Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998), relationship problems with their parents and behavioural and schooling difficulties were predominant among the issues cited. Some commentators (Furlong, 1985) argue that it is common sense that difficult pupils frequently come from difficult or unhappy homes.

- A high proportion were also referred because of concerns about the poor standard of care they were receiving at home and a number of the girls were known to have experienced some form of abuse. Recent research (Berridge and Brodie, 1998) indicates that the level of abuse experienced by children entering residential care has increased and there is some evidence that educational performance is adversely affected by sexual abuse (Kendall-Tackett *et al.,* 1993).

- There was little evidence that the young people had any involvement in offences at the initial stage of social work contact, with just two referrals citing this reason. Brodie (2001) found a similarly low level of offending behaviour among the 17 young people in her study sample.

- More than one-third of the initial referrals to the social work department included 'failure to attend school' as an issue and, proportionately, this was more apparent among the boys than among the girls.

- Although schooling problems were indicated in a high proportion of cases at the initial stage of referral, parents and relatives were much more likely to contact the social work department than schools were. In fact, of the ten initial referrals that expressed concerns about non-attendance, only three came from schools.

- Following initial placement in care, almost three-quarters of the group experienced more than one care placement and, in one case, a young person had six care placements prior to his current placement. A high proportion of the group were first placed in residential settings and for those who were initially placed with families, the pattern that usually followed entailed placement disruption and progressive movement towards residential care.

- Many of the initial care placements were emergency admissions but were made on a voluntary basis, that is, with their parent's consent. Most of these first placements were due to behaviour and relationship problems at home. Only one first placement was made because of the young person's failure to attend school.

- Eighty per cent of the first care placements lasted less than one year, the majority of these less than six months. Subsequent placements reflected a similar pattern of brevity. This pattern has been found in several recent studies (Berridge and Brodie, 1998; DoH, 1999; Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998) showing that although care episodes now tend to be much shorter than in the past, they also tend to be more frequent. Berridge and Brodie (1998) found that adolescent's care placements were particularly unstable and Sinclair and Gibbs (1998) found that more than 40 per cent of their sample had two or more care placements (cited in Brodie, 2001).

- Behaviour problems and difficulties at home, such as family breakdown and poor relationships, continued to be the main reason for placement at the time of the study. However, school related difficulties were also more apparent among the reasons for placement at this point than had been the case at the initial stage of placement.

- As with their first care placements, most of the young people's placements during the study period were unplanned and came about as a consequence of emergencies. However, unlike their first placements, the majority were now placed under compulsory measures. The use of supervision orders increased among those young people who were referred by their families as well as those who were referred by schools.

- Almost half of the group were admitted to their current care placements from other care settings, though mainly from family care placements. All the evidence indicates that those young people who were initially placed with families moved progressively from those placements to residential placement, indicating that residential care was used as a placement of 'last resort' (Wagner, 1988). Many of the group experienced intermittent episodes of care and home placement. The use of compulsory measures became more necessary with the passage of time and increased difficulties at school also became more apparent.

CHAPTER SIX

EDUCATION AND SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

Introduction

The previous chapter examined data concerning the characteristics and family backgrounds of all the young people in the study. The data described the reasons for initial social work intervention, subsequent features of the young people's care histories and the grounds for their current care placements. It was noted that school concerns were included in the reasons for initial referral of more than one third of the group and that the number of young people experiencing school problems had increased by the time they had reached their placement at the time of the study. It was also noted that there were multiple reasons for referral in many cases and that the difficulties young people experienced in their families and local communities were often inextricably linked to problems and issues that arose in the school context.

This chapter now deals with aspects of the young people's education histories and school experiences. The first section traces the group's early school careers and highlights concerns about the instability and disruption that was evident in many cases. Data concerning their current school arrangements are then presented. Here, there is evidence of difficult transitions to secondary school and of continuing disruption, usually associated with behavioural difficulties and non-attendance. Information is also provided about the number of school exclusions experienced by the group during the data collection stage of the study and, where applicable, about special arrangements made to support their education. The final section of the chapter examines details of any educational assessments and plans that were put in

place for the young people and considers the role of teachers and educational psychologists in the care planning and review process.

As with data concerning the young people's family backgrounds, it is notable that in many instances respondents were unable to provide details of the educational experiences of the group. This is a matter of some concern given that school issues were cited in the reasons for social work involvement with a high proportion of the group. Where information was provided, it indicated that the majority of the young people in the study had a variety of negative educational experiences. These difficulties are reflected in, for example, the number of times many of them had changed school, in the number of special school arrangements made, and in the degree of truancy and exclusion that characterised the group. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main issues identified in these areas.

School Histories

Case Records

It was anticipated that school related issues would feature from an early age in the lives of many of the young people. Respondents were therefore asked to supply details from the case records of the number of previous schools that the young people had attended, the length of time that they had spent in each of these schools and whether any difficulties had been identified at any stage. Information was also sought about any particular measures that had been taken to address the young people's educational needs during their early school careers.

As reported in the last chapter, there was evidence that school difficulties had featured in the lives of many of the young people and had been included either in the reasons for initial social work intervention or in the reasons for their present placement. Despite this, the case records did not hold much detailed information about the young people's school histories suggesting either, that this information was difficult to obtain or, that such information was not accorded much importance in the context of the care arrangements.

In ten cases (36%, n=28), the residential key-workers were unable to supply any details about the young person's earlier school career. In another eleven instances (39%, n=28), records were incomplete or inaccurate on this subject. Similarly, end-of-session school reports were not routinely obtained by care staff and so were unavailable for all but a few of the young people in the sample. Therefore, in the case of twenty-one young people (three-quarters of the sample), it was either difficult or impossible to gather a detailed account of the child's progression through school.

Even in those cases where information was provided, the reliability of the data sometimes appeared questionable. For example, in one case, a girl of thirteen years was said to have had two school placements lasting, at most, a total of 18 months. The information about this particular girl therefore indicates that she had missed more than 75% of her schooling and the researcher feels some disquiet about whether this is an accurate reflection of her school experience. That being said, a recent Scottish Executive inspection (HMI/SWSI, 2001) found that, in a group of fifty children, one child had missed over 40% of schooling through absence and two had missed more than 20%. Thus, significant loss of education has been reported elsewhere and it may indeed be the case that the girl had been absent from school during the majority of her school years.

In any event, details concerning the girl's school experiences were extremely thin and this made it very difficult to obtain an accurate picture of her abilities or potential let alone her actual record of achievement. Indeed, in general, the lack of availability or reliability of information in the care records about the prior or current educational experiences of the sample was one of the most significant findings in the study and suggests that maintaining information about the young people's educational needs was not afforded much priority in their care arrangements. Additionally, the researcher had great difficulty tracking down copies of the young people's school reports, despite enlisting the support of the education service manager for looked after children. Consequently, description and analysis of specific aspects of their school experiences, as evidenced in the following sections, was often extremely difficult.

Early School Placements

It was not possible to obtain *any* data concerning the early school arrangements of thirteen (46%, n=28) of the young people and in several other cases information was very limited. However, notwithstanding these difficulties, in those instances where either partial or more detailed data were available these indicate that, for many of the youngsters, early school experience had not been particularly stable. For example, in those fifteen cases where information was given about the duration of the young people's first school placement, this shows that fewer than half of these young people had remained in their first school for more than four years. For three children, first school placement lasted only six to twelve months. (See Table 11)

Table 11

First School Placement

Duration of first school placement	*Gender*		*Total*
	Male	Female	
6 months – 1 year	-	3	3
2 years – 3 years	1	1	2
3 years – 4 years	-	3	3
> 4 years	3	4	7
Not Known	5	8	13
Total	9	19	28

In seven (25%, n=28) cases where relatively detailed information was available, the overall picture was generally very discouraging with evidence of considerable movement and disruption in their education. The seven young people in question had amassed, between them, a total of thirty-four school placements. Two girls aged fifteen and sixteen years, had each been in six previous school placements. Another two girls aged fourteen and fifteen, had five prior school placements each. The remaining three, two boys aged fourteen and fifteen years and a girl aged fifteen, had

four earlier school placements apiece. Four of the other young people in the sample also had at least three earlier school placements.

For these seven young people, the duration of their school placements was generally short, lasting in the main from six months to two years. The most stable period of schooling for this group tended to be during their primary school years though, even here, placements seldom lasted more than four years. For the four girls who had multiple school placements, first school had been sustained for 3 years or more in three cases and second school had lasted this period of time for the other. In all four cases, however, subsequent placements were of a much shorter duration. Indeed, only one of the eleven young people with three or more school placements had remained in their third or subsequent school for more than 2-3 years. For all the others, subsequent school placements lasted between 3 months and 2 years, at most.

The data indicate that failure to maintain stability and continuity in early school arrangements had resulted in a subsequent pattern of breakdown, school transfer and educational disruption for this group. Behavioural difficulties at home also featured strongly and referral to the social work department and placement in care had commonly resulted. Hence, the need to deliver appropriate support services to meet identified needs at an early stage appears crucial to sustaining young people in mainstream education.

The experiences of the young people in this study also indicate that both primary schools and secondary schools may have lacked appropriate strategies or resources for dealing with difficulties within the school and for maintaining continuity and stability for members of the group. At least one quarter of the sample had experienced multiple school placements, suggesting that schools were perhaps passing the young people on when difficulties arose and that the underlying causes of these problems were not being addressed. Further research into the decision making process at this stage of the young people's school careers would prove helpful to shed some light on the issues that give rise to this situation.

Previous Behaviour Problems and School Responses

One of the objectives of the study was to examine how the education authority provided personal support to pupils at times of difficulty or crisis. The data indicate that, in general, schools were not particularly adept at managing problems within the mainstream context and that their inability to deal with behavioural issues, in particular, was an area of concern. Indeed, where behaviour problems arose, schools appeared to seek solutions through using external measures and resources or, alternatively, to resort to exclusion.

For example, behaviour difficulties were noted as early as the first school in four cases. In these cases, two of the young people concerned, a boy and a girl, were referred for 'special school' placements. One girl was referred to an educational psychologist and one boy was excluded from school. For the latter young person, first school had lasted more than four years. In each of these four situations, however, the youngsters subsequently had several changes of schools with one having a total of five schools and another four, prior to their school placements at the time of the study.

Behaviour problems continued to be noted throughout the subsequent school careers of all four of these young people and in two cases school problems were included in the reasons for referral to the social work department. It therefore appears that early manifestations of behaviour difficulties in school were not easily resolved and resulted in a pattern of ensuing school disruption for these children.

Educational problems also became increasingly evident for the other children in the sample as they progressed through their school careers. Where information was available, it showed that, in total, problems had been identified at an earlier school in twelve (43%, n=28) cases. For most, these difficulties were described as 'behavioural problems' and they also included 'non-attendance' in a number of situations.

For these children too, schools appeared unable to contain the problems within the school setting. Of the seven young people who were said to be experiencing

difficulties in their second school, two boys and a girl were excluded, one boy and girl were referred to an educational psychologist and one boy was referred for outreach teaching while another was placed in a different school. Where problems persisted into subsequent school placements, schools tended to resort more frequently to exclusion as their means of responding and four others in the sample (three boys and one girl) were excluded in their third school placement. In general, the formal and stern nature of the various measures taken by the schools suggests that, even at an early stage, the difficulties presented by these young people were relatively severe.

The data outlined above indicate that, in those cases where details were available, there were ongoing educational issues and difficulties throughout the school careers of a very high proportion of the sample. Even with limited availability of data, there were early indications of behaviour or attendance problems in half of the cases in the study and the schools' apparently experienced difficulty in managing these matters effectively within the school context at that stage. As shown by the data, many of the young people subsequently experienced multiple school placements and a number were later excluded from school or taken out of mainstream provision. More than one third of the young people in the sample were also referred for social work intervention.

For many, therefore, school problems arose before social work intervention commenced and it seems that they also continued to feature in the young people's lives afterwards. This suggests that, where school problems had become entrenched, social work services were largely unable to make a major impact on the educational progress of the young people concerned. Indeed, as detailed later in this chapter, even during the period of data collection, eight of the twelve young people who had problems noted in previous schools were excluded from their school.

The fact that educational difficulties were firmly established before many of the young people in the sample became looked after, supports the findings of earlier research as discussed in chapter two (e.g. Aldgate *et al*, 1993; Francis *et al* 1996;

Triseliotis *et al*, 1995) which indicate that school difficulties often contribute to entry to public care. The root of these difficulties, however, appears to lie in the circumstances that pertain prior to their care episode and many of the young people in this sample certainly had histories of poor educational experiences together with other personal and family problems. In light of the fact that previous educational difficulties had been recognised in a high proportion of the sample before entry to care, the next section examines the extent to which education was given priority for the study group.

The Young People's School Arrangements During the Study Period

Nature of School Placements

The principle of maintaining educational continuity in mainstream provision is well established in relevant guidance on the care arrangements for looked after children (Scottish Office, 1997, Vol.2, para.62). Nevertheless, one of the striking features of the study sample was the extent to which many required 'alternative' school provision.

The data show that, during the study period, there were difficulties in providing or sustaining mainstream school placements for more than one third of the sample (36%, n=28). Though resident in children's homes which were located in local neighbourhoods with mainstream secondary schools nearby, six of the group were enrolled in residential schools as day pupils and two, a boy and a girl, were enrolled in special day schools. Additionally, two boys aged 14 years and 15 years were not registered as pupils at any school and, disconcertingly, the current school arrangement was 'not known' for one boy (see Table 12).

On the whole, girls fared better than boys did in terms of being enrolled in mainstream schools. Indeed, fifteen of the nineteen girls in the sample were registered in mainstream schools but only two of the nine boys.

Table 12

School Placements During Study Period

Age	*Type of School*	*Gender*		*Total*
		Male	Female	
13 yrs	Mainstream Secondary	-	1	1
	Residential School	1	1	2
14 yrs	Mainstream Secondary	1	3	4
	Residential School	1	1	2
	No Current School	1	-	1
15 yrs	Mainstream Secondary	1	8	9
	Residential School	1	-	1
	Special Day School	1	1	2
	No Current School	1	-	1
	Not Known	1	-	1
16 yrs	Mainstream Secondary	-	3	3
	Residential School	-	1	1
Total		9	19	28

The need for 'special' school arrangements for a significant proportion of the sample is a clear indication of the difficulties these particular youngsters experienced in relation to education. Furthermore, even though a majority of the young people continued to be enrolled in mainstream schools this masked other underlying difficulties that pertained for them also. For example, as already shown, there was little evidence of continuity in the early school histories of this group and, as detailed below, few experienced stability in their secondary school placements with many also having significant truancy problems.

Transition to Secondary School

Children usually make the transition from primary school to secondary school around the age of eleven or twelve years and remain there, in all but a small proportion of cases, until their secondary education is complete. This was not so for the majority of

the study group. Though all of the young people were secondary school aged, little more than a third (39%, n–28) started their present school at the age of 11 or 12 years, suggesting that disruption of school arrangements continued to be a feature for the majority after transferring to secondary school (see table 13).

Table 13

Age admitted to School Attended During Study Period

Age	*Age Admitted to Current School*	*Gender*		*Total*
		Male	Female	
13 yrs	12 years	-	1	1
	13 years	1	-	1
	Not Known	-	1	1
14 yrs	12 years	2	2	4
	13 years	-	1	1
	14 years	-	1	1
	Not Applicable	1	-	1
15 yrs	11 years	-	2	2
	12 years	-	1	1
	13 years	-	1	1
	14 years	2	1	3
	15 years	1	2	3
	Not Applicable	1	-	1
	Not Known	1	2	3
16 yrs	11 years	-	1	1
	12 years	-	2	2
	15 years	-	1	1
Total		9	19	28

The data obtained by the study do not include reasons for changes in secondary school arrangements but whether it was due to problems encountered or because of other factors, overall, only a small number of the sample could be said to have made the transition from primary school to secondary school smoothly. All but two of

those who did so were girls and, of these, three were aged fifteen years and three were aged sixteen years. These six were the only members of the group who appeared to have maintained continuity over a number of years. Boys in the group appeared to be less likely to manage the early stages of secondary school successfully. Just two of the boys commenced their current school at the age of eleven or twelve years and remained there without disruption. Both of these were fourteen years old.

These data indicate that, for almost two-thirds of the sample, the move to secondary school was either delayed beyond the usual transfer age or a subsequent change of school had occurred after first commencement of their secondary schooling. Indications of problems or disruption in routine school arrangements were thus already apparent for a number of the study group at an early stage in their secondary schooling.

Stability of School Placement

In addition to the difficulties the young people experienced around the time of transition to secondary school, many in the sample did not have subsequent experience of remaining in a stable secondary school placement for an extended period of time. The data in Table 14 show that, in relation to their age, almost half of the sample had spent a comparatively short time in the school placement they were in during the study period.

One third (32%, n=28) of the young people, five girls and four boys, were less than one year in their present situation. Though this was to be expected in the case of the two 13 year olds (since they would have transferred to secondary school within the previous year), this was not so for six of this group who, in five cases, were aged 15 or 16 years, with the remaining girl aged 14 years old. Another four members of the sample, all aged 14 or 15 years, had only been in their current school between one and two years. Just one of the boys had been admitted to, and remained in, the same school for more than two years. This picture of instability mirrors the earlier school experiences of many in the study. Furthermore, though a high proportion of the total

study group had relatively short-lived current school placements, as with other aspects of their school experiences, this was particularly true for the boys.

Table 14

Length of Time in Current School

Age	*Length of time in current school*	*Gender*		*Total*
		Male	Female	
13 yrs	< 1 year	1	1	2
	Not Known	-	1	1
14 yrs	< 1 year	-	1	1
	1 year - 2 years	1	2	3
	2 years - 4 years	1	1	2
	Not Applicable	1	-	1
15 yrs	< 1 year	3	2	5
	1 year - 2 years	-	1	1
	2 years - 4 years	-	3	3
	4 years or more	-	1	1
	Not Known	1	2	3
	Not Applicable	1	-	1
16 yrs	< 1 year	-	1	1
	4 years or more	-	3	3
Total		9	19	28

The data indicate that lack of stability or continuity in educational arrangements were key issues for a high proportion of the sample both in terms of pre-care-placement schooling and post-care-placement experiences. These findings are similar to those of an earlier study (Berridge *et al*, 1996) where a group of thirteen young people in residential care had all experienced change of school for reasons other than age. This study was concerned, therefore, to explore the nature of these difficulties and to discover what may have contributed to this pattern of instability. In particular, the

investigation sought to examine whether issues of non-attendance and behaviour were a feature.

Ongoing School Difficulties – Attendance and Behaviour

As anticipated, further indications of negative educational experiences emerged in relation to both attendance and behaviour. Asked if there were any current problems relating to these areas, key-workers confirmed that a substantial majority of the study group (66%, n=28) were experiencing varying degrees of difficulty during the study period.

The data provided evidence that a high proportion of the young people had major problems concerning truancy, with six girls and three boys (32%, n=28) failing to attend school. Additionally, as already noted, two of the boys were not enrolled in a school at all. In total, therefore, eleven (39%, n=28) of the twenty-eight young people in the sample were not receiving regular education.

The data also showed that although a majority of the young people were registered in local mainstream schools (suggesting perhaps that their circumstances were relatively stable) they too, in fact, were having problems. Of the nine young people who were failing to attend school, seven were enrolled in local secondary schools. Moreover, among the group who were truanting from these schools, 'failure to attend school' had been included in the reasons for first referral to the social work department of six of them and three were in care during the study period specifically because of non-attendance. School problems were therefore major contributory factors to the 'in care' status of these young people and, as previously stated, there is little to suggest that social work intervention through placement in care had improved the situation as far as this aspect of the young people's lives was concerned.

In addition to the problem of truancy, another three girls and two boys were exhibiting challenging behaviour at school and one of the girls was being bullied. Another boy was said to have difficulties at school but the nature of his difficulties

was not specified. In total, therefore, eighteen (64%, n=28) of the young people in the sample had problems in relation to their schooling.

These data show then, that a higher proportion of the sample were experiencing school problems during their care placement than had been indicated in the reasons for their initial referral to the social work department. While it may be that prior school difficulties existed for those young people too but were not highlighted before being placed in care, there is also the possibility that the care experience was itself having a detrimental impact on the education of some of the young people.

As with earlier research (Biehal *et al*, 1995; Humberside County Council, 1995; HMI/SWSI, 2001; OFSTED, 1995) the findings in this study suggest that social work involvement does little to enhance the educational performance or outcomes of looked after children after they enter care. These findings indicate that the efficacy of placing children in public care as a means of resolving their educational difficulties must be challenged. Frequently, however, the decision regarding care placement is not based solely on this factor and, as with other children in public care, many of the young people in the sample became looked after because of the interplay of a variety of factors, of which educational difficulties was just one.

It is important to acknowledge that the care placements of the young people in this study were made in order to address a variety of issues. That these placements did not afford education a high priority, however, indicates that much more needs to be done to raise the profile and significance of their educational arrangements if the progress of children is to improve once they become looked after.

School Exclusion

Further evidence of the inability of social work services to improve the school performance of the group was found in the number of school exclusions experienced by the young people whilst being looked after.

Exclusion is temporary when a pupil is excluded from a school but remains on the register of that school because they are expected to return when the exclusion period is completed. The term 'exclusion/removed from the register' refers to a pupil who is permanently excluded and their name removed from the school register. Such a pupil would then be educated at another school or via some other form of provision. The process of being removed and subsequently receiving education elsewhere can either take place with, or without a break in school attendance (Scottish Executive, 2002).

Both temporary and permanent school exclusion was a major cause for concern in the study sample. A high proportion of the young people had not only experienced exclusion in earlier schooling but also continued to do so after becoming looked after. Eleven (39% n=28) of the group, seven girls and four boys, were temporarily excluded from school on at least one occasion during the study period. Five girls were temporarily excluded twice and two were excluded on three occasions.

Besides temporary exclusions, five boys and two girls (25%, n=28) were permanently excluded/removed from the school register during the study period. This included one boy and one girl who had not previously been temporarily excluded. In total, therefore, almost half (46%, n=28) of the sample experienced either temporary or permanent exclusion from school during the study period.

As local authorities were only asked for the first time to collect information on exclusions from the start of the 1998/99 school year, national figures for the study year are unavailable. Nevertheless, the national data for the period 1998/99 provide a useful basis for comparison with the study sample. During 1998/99 there were 34,831 exclusions from local authority schools in Scotland with eighty-five per cent of these from secondary schools. Over ninety-nine per cent of all exclusions were temporary and only 200 pupils were permanently excluded and removed from the register of the school (Scottish Executive, 2000b).

In comparison to these figures, young people in the study group were 10 times more likely to be temporarily excluded and fifty times more likely to be permanently

excluded than other pupils. Just 0.5 per cent of the general school population was permanently excluded in the 1998/99 school year compared with 25 per cent of the study sample during the study school year.

The national figures show that, overall, male pupils account for around 80 per cent of all exclusions from secondary schools. This was not so for the young people in the study sample with 42 per cent of the girls in the sample experiencing exclusion and 55 per cent of the boys. However, though the girls in the study group were, proportionately, just as likely as the boys were to be temporarily excluded from school, boys were five times more likely to be permanently excluded than girls were.

The duration of temporary exclusions experienced by the study group was similar to the national picture. The length of their periods of exclusion varied from one day to more than two weeks but the majority of the exclusions were between one and seven days. Three were between one and two weeks and two were for more than two weeks. Nationally, in 1998/99, nearly half of all temporary exclusions with a known duration were of either six half days (33 per cent) or four half days (15 per cent) duration. A further 31 per cent were for 10 half days duration or more.

Significantly, of all exclusions in 1998/99, 13 per cent involved children looked after by the local authority. Comparison with the overall school population showed that pupils looked after by the local authority had higher exclusion rates than other pupils. A recent Scottish Executive inspection (HMI/SWSI, 2001) also noted that looked after children account for a high percentage of all exclusions although they represent only 1 per cent of the school population. The inspection found that, in a sample of fifty looked after children, twenty-one (42%) had been excluded from school at least once. During the study year a similar proportion of the young people in this sample (46%, n=28) were affected by school exclusion.

The data arising in this study highlight that young people who are looked after by the local authority are disproportionately affected by school exclusion and therefore,

more likely to be educationally disadvantaged. This is clearly a major concern and the need to reduce school exclusions among this group must be viewed as a priority.

Measures Taken to Address Education Difficulties

Given the evidence that many of the young people in the sample had experienced difficulties throughout their earlier schooling, the study sought to obtain information about those measures, if any, that had been taken by the education authorities to address these difficulties.

Returns from key-workers indicated that no prior action had apparently been taken in relation to two of the young people even though significant school problems existed in both of these cases. However, the returns also show that in the remaining sixteen of the eighteen cases where previous educational problems were identified, a variety of measures had been used, from relatively low-key responses to much more extreme measures.

For example, in several cases the action taken by schools remained at an informal level with support being provided by school guidance staff. In other cases, it was reported that meetings had been held between the young person's teacher and social worker to discuss ways of overcoming problems. In light of the severity and long-standing nature of many of the young people's difficulties, however, the appropriateness and effectiveness of these measures is open to question and given the ongoing issues that beset these young people, it appears to the writer that further action was required.

In the main, early measures to address the young people's educational issues appeared to be locally determined at school level rather than reflecting a wider coordinated response. So, for example, although many of the study group had a history of truancy and/or behaviour problems (and these difficulties subsequently contributed to many of them becoming looked after) there was no evidence that individual education plans had been used as a means of addressing these concerns.

In some cases there were indications that more structured measures were deployed. For example, one boy and two girls were given outreach teaching while, for another girl, a work placement was arranged. In one case, a girl was referred to the children's panel because of concerns about her school attendance and she was subsequently placed on a supervision order. Two other young people had been referred for a place in a residential school. Generally, however, these approaches did not appear to be sufficient to affect the underlying causes of the young people's difficulties, which in most cases, continued. The most extreme measure taken by schools was exclusion from school and, as indicated above, this response was used with several of the young people prior to them being placed in public care.

Once placed in care, there was little evidence to show that structured arrangements had been put in place to support all of the young people's education from the outset of their placements. In sixteen (57% n=28) cases key-workers reported that no special provision had been made and in two cases it was not known if any measures had been put in place. Of the remainder of the group, two girls and two boys had special transport arrangements, two girls were given day places in residential schools and a girl and boy were placed in special day schools. One girl had received outreach teaching support after placement and another was referred to the youth strategy service - a joint social work and education service aimed at supporting young people's education and preventing reception into care.

In general then, apart from the provision of transport arrangements and referral to the youth strategy service, the measures taken to support the young people's education were mainly reactive rather than proactive. There was little to suggest that education was promoted from the beginning of individual care arrangements, despite the history of school difficulties that was apparent in the majority of cases. By and large, practice appeared to be fragmented and did little to support the principles of prioritising education in the young people's care plans or maintaining continuity in their school arrangements.

Educational Assessments and Plans

The lack of attention given to young people's educational needs was reflected in the general failure to ensure that comprehensive educational assessments were undertaken in relevant cases. Though it is clear that prior educational difficulties featured strongly in many instances, respondents indicated that formal assessment of the young people's educational needs was not routinely undertaken. Indeed, from the returns provided, only six (21%, n=28) of the group were said to have had a formal education assessment but even in these cases the key-workers were unable to state what the outcome of the assessment was.

Despite the absence of comprehensive assessments of their educational needs, the respondents indicated that for many of the young people education matters were being addressed through the care planning process. The returns indicated that, during the study period, a total of ninety-three child-care reviews were held in respect of the study group and the young people's school circumstances were said to have been discussed at eighty-four (90%, n=93) of these. Records of these reviews indicated that, in six cases, arrangements were being made for the young people to be placed in residential schools while, in another two cases, places were being sought in special schools. Arrangements for outreach teaching services were being made in two more instances.

Important decisions about educational provision were thus apparently being made for a high proportion of the group in the context of care planning meetings. It is not clear to the researcher, however, what assessment information was being used as a basis for these decisions nor what processes were used.

Indeed, although respondents indicated that educational issues were discussed at the majority of child-care reviews, teachers were said to have attended just forty-two (45%, n=93) of the reviews while educational psychologists were said to have attended only four (4%, n=93). The absence of education personnel from the

majority of the reviews is a cause for concern and highlights an area where more collaboration between education and social work services is needed.

On the basis of the data available to the study then, it appears that there is scope for much more effective co-ordination and joint planning between education and social work in a number of areas. The returns show that there was little emphasis, for example, on the need for detailed assessment of the young people's educational needs, even where school problems were apparent. Consequently, though plans were being made for many, these appeared to lack detailed evaluation of their individual requirements and seemed to place greater emphasis on containment of difficulties rather than on improving attainment. Additionally, teachers and educational psychologists were not routinely involved in the care planning discussions and there were no indications of strategic objectives in relation to the provision of educational support for looked after children. Both policy and practice in relation to assessment and planning appear to be areas that require considerable development.

Summary

- Although school problems featured in the majority of cases in the sample and were often among the factors that led to social work involvement, the quality of the information held in their case records was very poor. In three-quarters of the cases it was either difficult or impossible to obtain accurate details of the young person's education experiences. As with a recent Scottish Executive inspection (HMI/SWSI, 2001), the study found that most files had little or no information about which schools the child had previously attended or about their educational progress. Neither did the files contain copies of the children's school reports. The data therefore suggest that maintaining up-to-date information about the young people's education was not considered a high priority in the care arrangements of the young people.

- The early school years of a high proportion of the sample were characterised by instability and disruption. Many had experienced multiple school placements and seven of the young people had amassed a total of thirty-four previous school placements between them. Most of these placements were of a relatively short duration and it appeared that schools were passing the young people on at this stage and were not managing their difficulties within the school. A subsequent pattern of disruption and discontinuity developed for many. It appears, therefore, that more emphasis is needed on targeting resources to meet the educational needs of children as soon as difficulties are identified.

- Behaviour problems in early schooling were identified in almost half of the cases in the sample. Schools appeared to have particular difficulties dealing with such problems and the children were often transferred to other schools or were excluded from school. Behaviour problems, including non-attendance, contributed to the pattern of school disruption and also resulted in referral to the social work department in one third of the cases in the sample. Altogether, educational problems, including behavioural difficulties, were firmly established for at least half of the sample before they became looked after. However, there was no evidence that subsequent social work intervention had improved the educational progress of the young people.

- For almost two-thirds of the sample the transition from primary school to secondary school was not straightforward and a high proportion continued to experience disruption at secondary school with changes of school for reasons other than age. Few of the young people had experience of continuity in their secondary schooling but this was particularly true for the boys in the group. After being placed in care, more than one-third of the sample were placed in special provision outwith mainstream schools. Boys were less likely to be in mainstream schools than girls.

- Two-thirds of the young people continued to have behaviour or attendance problems in their current schools and almost 40% were not receiving regular education, either because of failure to attend or because they were not enrolled in a school.

- Social work intervention, including placement in care, failed to improve the situation for these young people. Indeed, a higher proportion of the sample had school problems after becoming looked after than before. Placing these children in care does not therefore appear to have been the solution to their educational problems. Many of them became looked after because of the interplay of several factors and there were often multiple issues to address. Notwithstanding this, it does not seem that education was given a high degree of priority in their care placement arrangements.

- School exclusion was a particularly worrying feature among the study group with almost half of the sample experiencing either temporary or permanent exclusion during the study period. Based on the national figures for the 1998/99 school year (the first time that national statistics were collated), young people in the study were fifty times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than children in the general school population. Looked after children generally experience higher exclusion rates than other pupils so are more likely to fare badly educationally. The findings in this study indicate that local authorities need to tackle this issue as a matter of urgency.

- There was no evidence of structured, individual education plans for any of the children in the sample. Similarly, there was little to indicate that workers operated within a strategic or policy framework. Many of the measures taken in response to the young people's difficulties appeared to be designed to contain or move the problem rather than to address the underlying causes.

- In most cases, it did not appear that education was promoted from the beginning of individual care arrangements, despite the history of school difficulties that many had experienced. Practice was fragmented and there was little evidence of prioritising education in the young people's care plans or maintaining continuity in their school arrangements after they became looked after.

- Formal assessment of the young people's educational needs was not routinely undertaken, yet important decisions were being taken at child care reviews about their school arrangements. Though education issues were discussed at the majority of reviews, teachers were often absent from these meetings and educational psychologists were seldom in attendance.

- In general, there appeared to be a need for greater collaboration and joint working in relation to the assessment of children's educational needs, preparation of appropriate individual education plans and delivery of resources within mainstream schools.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CASE STUDIES

Introduction

Chapters five and six highlighted the most significant aspects of the care and educational experiences of the young people in the sample. This chapter begins with a tabulated summary of some of those key characteristics for the group as a whole (see Table 15) and then goes on to describe the circumstances of four of the young people in some detail (all names have been changed to preserve the young people's anonymity).

The summary information in Table 15 serves to illustrate the extent of the disruption and movement that many of the young people in the sample experienced in both their care careers and their school arrangements. Hence, in the 21 cases where previous care histories were known, the young people had a total of 62 placements - an average of three placements per child. Similarly, in the 19 cases where details were provided, the children had amassed a total of 80 school placements - an average of four schools per child.

Using a similar method of collecting and organising data, Brodie, (2001) found that one of the consequences of such a high degree of disruption in the young people's lives is that important information, such as care histories and school records, get lost along the way. Such an explanation may account for the gaps in information in many of the cases reported here. As previously discussed, this is certainly an issue that affected the quantity and quality of the data that were presented in chapters five and six.

Following the tabulated summary of the data set, brief case studies of four of the young people are provided to illustrate the level of disruption more fully and to give a general indication of the degree of difficulty associated with the emotional, social and educational welfare of the young people in this study. The cases have been selected to provide a sense of the context and focus of the research and they represent the major distinctions in the data set between age, gender, and stage of secondary education. The cases were also selected on the grounds that they exemplify the differences in the amount of detail that was provided about the backgrounds and educational experiences of the young people. As with the summary details, all names have been anonymised.

The details presented in the case studies serve not only as a useful basis for highlighting some of the individual features and experiences of the young people concerned, but also as a reminder to the reader that these are real people. They each come from unique circumstances and many have endured exceptional difficulties and hardships. It is important to acknowledge the uniqueness of each individual in the research and not to lose sight of their specific needs and experiences.

That is not to say, of course, that they do not share many common features and characteristics. These common areas were explored in some detail in chapters five and six. However, the data examined in this chapter provide a helpful insight into the particular needs and attributes of the young people as individuals and caution us not to simply subsume these within the issues that encapsulate the wider concerns and experiences of the group as a whole. To recognise individual differences, while also identifying shared characteristics, is important both for research purposes and for those who have day-to-day care of young people in group-care settings.

Table 15

Details of the Care and Education Experiences of the Sample

Case	*Duration of current care episode*	*Number of foster care placements*	*Number of residential placements*	*Number of Schools attended*	*Legal Status of current placement*	*Reason for Current Placement*
Jean	9 months	None	3	7	Supervision Order	Lack of parental care
Vicki	7 months	None	3	4	Supervision Order	School problems
Sarah	6 months	1	None	Not known	Voluntary	Relationship problems with mother
Janet	1yr 1month	2	1	7	Voluntary	Family breakdown
Diana	1yr 11months	None	3	3	Supervision Order	Outwith parental control
Sue	1 year	1	3	6	Supervision Order	Family breakdown
Linda	3 months	1	1	3	Voluntary	Family breakdown
Kirsty	4 months	1	1	7	Voluntary	Family breakdown
Paul	6 months	3	1	4	Voluntary	Family breakdown
Emma	6 months	Not known	Not known	4	Supervision Order	Family difficulties
Billy	4 months	1	1	4	Supervision Order	Outwith parental control
Lesley	6 months	Not known	Not known	2	Not known	Not known
Gill	7 months	8	2	5	Supervision Order	Foster placement breakdown
Irene	9 months	None	2	3	Supervision Order	School exclusion
Rob	1 month	None	2	Not known	Supervision Order	Truancy
Faye	5 months	1	1	Not known	Voluntary	Relationship problems with mother
Dave	7 months	1	1	2	Voluntary	Foster placement breakdown
Polly	9 months	1	2	3	Supervision Order	Outwith parental control
James	1yr 3months	None	1	Not known	Supervision Order	Outwith parental control
Fiona	6 months	Not known	Not known	2	Not known	Family breakdown
Jay	4 months	Not known	Not known	6	Supervision Order	Outwith parental control
Steve	6 months	1	4	4	Supervision Order	Outwith parental control
Clare	1yr 3months	2	1	Not known	Voluntary	Foster placement breakdown
Pete	Not known	Not known	Not known	Not known	Not known	Not known
Tim	Not known	None	4	Not known	Not known	Family relationship problems
Lucy	Not known	Not known	Not known	Not known	Not known	Outwith parental control
Liz	Not known	Not known	Not known	Not known	Voluntary	Foster placement breakdown
Jim	1yr 4months	None	1	4	Supervision Order	Outwith parental control

Case 1 - Scott

At the time of the study, Scott was aged 13 years. As with all the other young people in the sample, Scott was white. From the information provided by his care worker it appears that Scott had no health problems or physical or learning disabilities. It is not known whether he had any 'formal' contact with psychological services before the social work department became involved. However, since first coming to the attention of social work there has been involvement by psychological services.

Scott came from an intact nuclear family, that is, where both birth parents were present. No other members of the family were living away from home at that time, though precise details of other family members were not supplied to the writer. The family lived in owner-occupied accommodation but the care worker was unable to provide information concerning the family's main source of income or whether there were any financial difficulties at home.

Teachers at his school first referred Scott to the social work department a few months before he reached his thirteenth birthday and shortly after he transferred to secondary school. He was also referred to the reporter to the children's hearing system at that time. He was referred to both agencies because he was failing to attend school.

Though Scott had no previous involvement with the social work department, and was living at home with his family at the time of the referral, he was subsequently placed, on an unplanned basis, in a residential school under a compulsory supervision order from the children's panel. He remained in that placement for ten months and was then transferred to the placement he was in at the time of the study, just one month earlier. He remained on a compulsory supervision order on the grounds that he was still failing to attend school on a regular basis.

He was then registered at a 'special school' which offered education either on a residential care or day care basis to children with emotional and behavioural problems. Though living in a residential home, Scott was required to attend the

school as a day pupil but no special provision, such as school transport, was provided. Scott continued to have attendance problems and staff were monitoring the situation and encouraging him to attend.

Scott's educational needs were formally assessed during the previous academic year and this assessment showed that he had academic potential and artistic ability.

Despite the history of concerns about Scott's educational circumstances, it was not possible to obtain details of his previous education history from his care worker. Nor did the care worker know if Scott had ever been excluded from school. As stated earlier, attempts to obtain information about many of the young people's school records (including a meeting with the manager of the children in care educational support team), proved futile. Thus Scott's educational background remained unclear to both care staff and researcher.

During his current care episode Scott has had three child-care reviews. One of his teacher's attended one of these and an educational psychologist also attended one review. Besides deciding on the arrangement to attend special school, no other measures were planned for Scott's future education. However, his key-worker stated that he was satisfied that enough was being done to support Scott's education.

Case 2 - Billy

Billy was almost fifteen years old at the time of the study. Like all the young people in the study, Billy was white and of Scottish origins. The questionnaire return provided by his care worker indicated that he had no known chronic health problems, learning disabilities, physical disabilities or psychological problems (however, as will be shown later, Billy had displayed significant behavioural problems for some years).

Billy came from a relatively stable family background and normally resided with both his birth parents. His care records apparently did not include details of the

family income and his care worker therefore did not know if there were any financial difficulties at home. However, both parents were in employment and they lived in an owner occupied house. The care worker provided no details of siblings.

Billy was first referred to the social work department when he was 13 years and 8 months old. There was no record of social work involvement with Billy prior to that time. The care worker did not know who made the first referral but the reason recorded in his case file was that Billy was 'outwith his parent's control'.

One year after the initial referral was made, Billy was placed on a planned basis with community carers, (i.e. foster carers recruited specifically to work with teenagers). The reason given for that placement was that he was still beyond his parent's control. However, his first placement only lasted for a period of days before breaking down and Billy was then transferred to a Young People's Centre (YPC - a residential children's home) on an emergency basis. At that point Billy was made the subject of a supervision requirement by a children's hearing and the supervision order incorporated a requirement to reside in the Young People's Centre. The grounds for the supervision requirement were still that Billy was 'outwith his parent's control'. At the time of the study Billy remained in that placement - a period of four months.

Though social work care records indicated that Billy first came to the attention of that department at the age of thirteen, there were clearly difficulties at school stemming from a much earlier period. In fact, Billy was 'expelled' from his first mainstream primary school at the age of ten because he "would not behave". He had been attending that school for five years. He was subsequently transferred to another local primary school where he remained for two years and was then 'excluded', again because he "would not behave".

Billy then commenced local mainstream secondary school at the age of twelve but he continued to display behaviour problems and was excluded from school for a third time when he was thirteen. It was around this time that Billy was referred to the social work department. Throughout the next year, prior to being placed with

community carers, he attended a local 'Youth Strategy Centre' (a joint social work/education facility for children experiencing difficulties at home or at school and who are at risk of being placed in care). There is no record of problems during his period there.

At the time of the study, Billy remained excluded from his previous secondary school and was not registered with any mainstream school. His education was discussed during the child-care placement reviews at the YPC and a teacher from his previous school attended but there was no involvement by educational psychology services. No special measures were in place for Billy's education and his key-worker did not feet that enough was being done to support his education. In her view, Billy required a "supported school place that can deal with his behaviour".

Case 3 - Kirsty

Kirsty was 15 years and 5 months old at the time of the study. Like Billy, the questionnaire return made by her care worker indicated that she had no chronic health problems, learning disabilities, physical disabilities or psychological problems.

Kirsty's family background showed that she had experienced periods of instability and disruption. Prior to her placement during the study period, she was living at home with her mother in a rented local authority house. Originally from the north of Scotland, her parents had separated a short time previously and her father continued to live in the north of Scotland with her two brothers. She also had an older sister who lived with her fiancé in the north of Scotland. Kirsty's mother was unemployed and reliant on welfare benefits. The care worker had no knowledge of the family income or whether the family had any financial problems.

Kirsty was first referred to the social work department when she was seven years old. Both her mother and the school were involved in the initial referral and the reason given was that Kirsty was failing to attend school. At that time all the family lived

together and Kirsty remained at home. No details of further action were held on the case record until Kirsty was first placed in the care of the local authority on a voluntary basis at the age of fifteen. The reason given for that placement was 'family breakdown'. She was initially placed on an unplanned basis with foster carers but remained there for just one week. She was then transferred, under emergency arrangements, to the Young People's Centre where, at the time of the study some four months later, she continued to reside on a voluntary basis.

Records indicated that Kirsty experienced difficulties at school from an early age. She was referred to social work at the age of seven because of problems with attendance and she attended a total of three primary schools in a seven-year period. She transferred to secondary school at the usual age of twelve, remaining there for two years before moving to another school when the family moved south. Around that time, however, the family split up and she returned to her previous school in the north of Scotland, after only a few months in her new school. Her return to the north proved problematic and records show that she was failing to attend school during the two years that she remained there. She subsequently moved south again to live with her mother and returned to the school that she had previously briefly attended. Though unable to remain at home with her mother, she continued to be registered at the same school after being placed in care. Her attendance was poor and there was social work involvement with the school where her guidance teacher was also working with her on the issue. At no time had Kirsty been excluded from school, either on a temporary or permanent basis.

During the period that she was in the YPC she had one care review. Education was discussed at that review but there was no teacher or educational psychologist in attendance. There was no formal assessment of Kirsty's educational needs during her time in care and no special educational provisions were in place. Though the residential care worker felt that not enough was being done to support Kirsty's education and that she needed more positive choices and effective resources, the only action taken by care staff was to continue encouraging her to attend.

Case 4 - Janet

At the time of the study Janet was 16 years old. She had no known chronic health problems, learning disabilities, physical disabilities, or psychological problems.

Originally from England, Janet was a member of a 'forces family' and she spent five months overseas in Germany when she was eight years old. Before being placed in care, Janet's parents split up and she subsequently became a member of a 'mixed family', that is, her mother, step-father, full siblings and step-siblings. She also had an older brother who was in the army and an older sister who lived independently from the family. Her father died a short time prior to the research (precise details are not known to the writer). The family lived in owner-occupied accommodation and, though her key-worker did not know exact details of the family income, both parents had an income. There were no reported financial difficulties in the family.

Prior to the age of thirteen there was no social work involvement with Janet. However, at that point, due to 'family problems', her mother referred her to the social work department. Following a fifteen-month period of social work involvement, she was placed on a voluntary, planned basis with foster carers. The reason given at that time was 'family breakdown'. Janet remained in the care of that foster family for eight months. Thereafter, at the age of 15, she was transferred, again on a planned basis, to another foster family. The reasons for this transfer are not entirely clear from the record but the placement lasted for nine months before it broke down and emergency arrangements were made to accommodate her in the YPC where she then resided. She had lived in that, her third placement, for one year and she remained in care on a voluntary basis due to 'family breakdown'.

Janet began her schooling at a primary school in England. She remained there without problems for three years at which point the family moved to Germany and she spent five months in a primary school there. On return from Germany, the family moved to Scotland and Janet attended four primary schools in a three-year period. The reasons for these frequent changes are unclear but social work files make no

note of problems at school during these episodes. Janet transferred to secondary school at the usual age and she remained there for four years - three of which were while she was looked after.

During the time that she was in her residential care placement there were a number of child-care reviews. Though school staff did not attend any of these, school matters, including exam results, were discussed. Janet completed her compulsory schooling without incident and at no time was excluded from school or had problems with attendance. At the time of the research she was awaiting a place in college.

Summary

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the cases presented above serve to illustrate a number of key features concerning the experiences of individual young people in the sample.

- As with much of the data provided elsewhere in the study, one of the features that is immediately apparent to the researcher is the extent to which aspects of the young people's previous histories and current background circumstances were apparently missing from their case records. Details of some of the young people's siblings, their parent's financial circumstances, their previous care histories or their school experiences were often missing from the returns provided by their key-workers.

- Gaps in the information held by the young people's carers serve to indicate that day-to-day care, as well as longer term planning and decision making, evidently occurred in the context of limited knowledge of the young person's needs, abilities or experiences. In the writer's view, the quality of decision-making in such circumstances must clearly be open to question.

- Where details were available, they provide useful insights into some of the particular pathways and experiences of the young people and, though each of the case studies examined here reflects different backgrounds and individual circumstances, they also highlight some very important features that appear to be common to all, or the majority, of them.

- The background circumstances of the four young people were very varied. Both Scott and Billy came from seemingly stable home circumstances comprising of nuclear families living in owner occupied accommodation, with no obvious financial difficulties. Kirsty, on the other hand, had come from a 'fragmented family' and had experienced a number of disruptions in her home circumstances including the break-up of her parent's marriage and several changes of home and school. Janet also had experience of family problems, including her parent's separation and, later, the death of her father. Also, due to family employment circumstances, she had experienced considerable movement and disruption throughout her childhood. However, despite the high degree of disruption to both her home circumstances and schooling, Janet was the only one of the four who apparently had no school related problems.

- The fact that there were early indications of school and behavioural problems for three of the four young people is one of the most significant features of this sub-group. Both of the boys displayed behavioural difficulties – Scott refusing to attend school and Billy being described as 'outwith parental control'. In Billy's case, poor behaviour had resulted in exclusion from school at the age of ten. Kirsty also had school attendance problems from a very early age.

- School problems were therefore present in three of the cases before the social work department became involved and in two of the cases these problems had been recognised at a relatively early stage in their primary school careers,

(Kirsty was aged 7 and Billy was aged 10). Despite these early indications of difficulty, three of the four young people were only first referred to the social work department as teenagers. It seems that in all of these cases difficulties had reached crisis proportions by this stage and placement in care followed quickly. In Kirsty's case, it is not clear what action was taken when she was first referred to social work at the age of seven due to school attendance problems but these problems had obviously not subsided and she continued to truant during her time in care. The details explored in these four cases appear to mirror the broader pattern for the sample as a whole.

- In relation to their care episodes, the details show that school and behavioural problems continued to feature for the majority of this sub-set, with compulsory supervision measures being required in the case of both boys. In Billy's case, behaviour problems had resulted in exclusion from school and were a major obstacle to finding alternative provision. Both Scott and Kirsty continued to have school attendance problems despite, in Scott's case, the use of 'special school' provision. Only Janet appears to have maintained a degree of progress and continuity in her schooling and this seems to reflect her earlier ability to manage at school even though she experienced a high degree of movement and disruption in her home circumstances.

- All of the young people in this sub-set had experienced more than one care placement after first becoming looked after. In total, the group had 9 placements ranging from as brief as a few days, to a little over one year. Only three of these placements were made on a planned basis, the others being arranged in emergency circumstances at short notice. All except Scott had previously been placed with foster carers but both Billy and Kirsty only remained in these placements for a matter of days before they had broken down. In Janet's case there were indications that foster care had been more suitable as she had two foster care placements and each of these had lasted a

relatively long period compared to other care placements for the group as a whole (8 months and 9 months, respectively).

- In addition to considerable change and disruption in their care arrangements, there was evidence of significant movement and disruption in the school arrangements for this small group. Though information about their school histories was available for only three of the four young people, between them they had amassed a total of eighteen schools. In Janet's case, a number of these moves were due to changes in her family living arrangements through employment circumstances. However, the majority of the changes appear to reflect concerns about poor attendance and difficult behaviour and, as already stated, some of these changes occurred after the young people had become looked after.

- Despite all the evidence of prolonged school related problems, information obtained from the key-workers indicates that psychological services were only involved with one of the four cases. Similarly, there appears to have been little in the way of formal educational assessment, with only Scott's key-worker reporting that he had been assessed during the previous year. The level of school or educational psychologist input to the child care reviews also appears to be limited and none of the young people were said to be receiving any special education measures, though, in fact, Scott was attending a 'special school' on a day-pupil basis.

- The writer recognises that, given gaps in the information available to the care workers, other services or supports may have been supplied for the young people at some stage in their school careers. However, from the available data, the degree of formal assessment or specialist educational support to this group of largely educationally disadvantaged youngsters, did not seem to be at a level that adequately reflects their needs.

- Examination of the four cases outlined above has produced a more detailed representation of some of the individual circumstances and experiences of the young people in the study. However, it appears also that the issues and concerns highlighted by these four cases reflect the general picture for the sample as a whole, illustrating as they do, the prior existence of significant educational problems in the majority of cases and the failure to reverse these difficulties after they had become looked after.

- Similarly, there appears to have been a lack of co-ordinated assessment and planning in relation to their educational needs and the application of additional supports or specialist services seems wanting. Interestingly, despite experiencing considerable disruption and instability in both her family and care circumstances, one of the young people maintained a satisfactory degree of progress throughout her schooling and at the time of the study was awaiting a place in college. Her ability to cope in such adverse circumstances raises the question of how individual resilience promoting factors may play a role in offsetting this adversity. These and other matters will be discussed more fully in later chapters.

CHAPTER EIGHT

USING THE LOOKING AFTER CHILDREN MATERIALS

Introduction

The data provided in the foregoing three chapters have demonstrated that the majority of the young people in this study were experiencing considerable problems in relation to their education, both before and after they became looked after. In particular, there is evidence that a high proportion of them were displaying behavioural difficulties at school and many were truanting on a regular basis. Furthermore, the level of school exclusion among the sample was inordinately high compared to the general school population. Lack of available school records make it difficult to state the standard of academic performance achieved by the young people but on the basis of the issues outlined above it is not unreasonable to speculate that most were not performing to the level expected for their age group.

The findings show that educational difficulties were in evidence for many of the young people in the sample prior to coming to the attention of the social work department. In several cases, these difficulties commenced at an early stage in their school careers. Despite this there is little indication that education was given a high priority once the young people became looked after and education difficulties continued to exist throughout their time in public care. In fact, a higher proportion of the sample had school difficulties after placement than had been indicated in their initial referrals.

Corporate Parenting and the Role of the LAC Materials

The findings described above support the view that something more than 'normal' parental interest is needed to combat the educational disadvantages that young people in public care experience. It was therefore anticipated that the Looking After Children materials would provide a structured approach to assessing educational need and constructing plans in order to make a positive impact on the educational performance of the young people concerned. Moreover, since the Looking After Children Materials were devised to examine how better to assess the outcomes for children in public care (Parker *et al*, 1991) it was anticipated that they would promote a degree of corporate parental responsibility in relation to these young people.

Corporate Parenting is the term used to describe a local authority's responsibility to improve the life chances of Looked After Children aged 0-18 and to enable them to reach their full potential by providing encouragement and care consistent with good parenting. Corporate parenting in relation to their education should reflect effective joint working based on a consistent and holistic parenting approach. Local authorities are guided in their role as corporate parents by government led initiatives such as 'Quality Protects' and one of the principle objectives of this initiative is to ensure that looked after children gain maximum life chance benefits from educational opportunities, health and social care (Objective 4). Another recent initiative 'Education Protects' also emphasises the centrality of education to the corporate parenting role of local authorities.

Reducing the gap between the educational outcomes of looked after children and their peers is vital since education is the key to improving life chances. Raising the life opportunities of looked after children requires a whole authority commitment and the guiding principle which must underpin practice is that services should always be of a standard that would be acceptable for our own children. Ensuring that looked after children gain access to the same level of educational opportunity that we would demand for our own children should therefore lie at the heart of corporate policy.

As stated in chapter two, Jackson and Sachdev (2001) argue that the Looking After Children materials promote two aspects of the concept of corporate parenting. First, local authorities need to have effective structures and procedures in place to ensure that all professionals and agencies are working effectively together for the benefit of children in public care. Second, they need to ensure that an individual has an overview of the progress of the child and takes a special interest in the child.

Assessment and Action Records

The LAC materials comprise a series of planning and review forms together with a pack of age-related Assessment and Action Records (AARs). The Assessment and Action Records were specifically developed to promote good quality care, to improve the assessment of children's needs in relation to seven developmental dimensions, including education, and to help professionals and carers identify the key actions necessary to meet those needs. It was envisaged that the AARs would be particularly useful for work with children and young people who were likely to be cared for away from home for a considerable period. When used at regular intervals it is intended that the completed documents will provide detailed information to inform planning for individual children and assess their progress over time. Moreover, it is suggested that aggregated data from these records can be used to evaluate services and identify how resources can be used more efficiently. While the designers of the system see these aims as complementary, in my view they represent an inherent tension and there is a danger that many young people (and possibly social work staff) will simply opt out of the process if they see it as a bureaucratic exercise (Francis, 2002).

A series of questions within each of the developmental dimensions seek to establish whether children are being offered the experiences that research suggests are necessary for their satisfactory progress. The questions relate to specific objectives and, through careful assessment of the extent to which these objectives are met, it is hoped that it will be possible to compare how a young person has fared since the previous assessment was completed. A summary sheet at the end of the AARs

identifies what work needs to be done, by whom, and in what timescale. The purpose is to clarify the division of responsibility between the social services, the parents and the carers. Action should be planned in consultation with the child and the adults involved, with the aim of preparing the child for adult life in the best possible way.

Some criticism of the materials questions the normative view of parenting and family life which is seen to be at the heart of the documents and concern has also been expressed about the lack of consideration of how to resource the action plans. A further criticism is that the checklist approach could enhance the bureaucratic nature of being in public care and, in turn, lead to a negative impact on the development of a partnership model of care (Knight and Caveney, 1998). While Jackson (1998) has rebutted these views, claiming that they are misconceived and driven more by ideological than evidential considerations, I believe it is vital that we do not disregard the very real concerns and anxieties about problems that many young people and their families may experience. These problems could lead to resistance and perhaps, unwillingness, to engage in the process. Equally, I believe it is important to promote the very strong potential of the materials and, despite the criticisms outlined above, evaluations of the pilot stages of implementation have shown that practitioners view the system positively and feel that they make a helpful contribution to the assessment, planning and review of looked after children.

At the outset of the study then, the researcher was interested in examining whether use of the Assessment and Action Record would make a positive impact on the educational experience of looked after children. Unfortunately, due to difficulties in obtaining school records, it was not possible to measure the impact of the materials using end-of-year reports as a basis for comparison. Nevertheless, the researcher obtained data about the subjective experiences of care workers who had used the materials with a small sub-set of the study sample. As outlined in the methodology chapter, six residential care staff each used the education section of the materials with one of the young people in the study group. Interviews were held with each of these six workers. These interviews sought to obtain information about their views

and experiences of using the AARs and thus to highlight issues about the operation of the materials. In particular, the interviews were devised to:

- Ascertain whether staff felt adequately prepared for using the material
- Identify who was involved in completing the AAR and how much time was required for the process
- Gauge whether staff felt that the materials were generally well structured and contained clear and relevant questions
- Determine whether they were useful in co-ordinating the education arrangements of looked after children
- Consider if they helped to engage young people and their parents in discussions about their educational needs
- Consider if the roles and responsibilities of professionals were clearer as a consequence of using the materials
- Examine whether the AAR helped in the assessment, planning and review of looked after children
- Determine whether the materials helped to improve joint practice with schools

This chapter provides details of the respondent's views on each of these matters and also highlights additional significant comments made by staff during the course of the interviews. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main findings.

Staff Training and Preparation

None of the staff interviewed had received any structured training or preparation prior to using the Assessment and Action Records. They also stated they had been given no guidance to help them understand the underlying principles or intended purpose of the materials nor to consider the manner in which they should be used. Consequently, none of them felt well equipped to implement the materials with the young people in the study group. Indeed, the following comment typifies respondents experiences, illustrating that the preparation they received was extremely informal,

amounting to little more than occasional brief discussions in staff groups or discussions between individual members of staff and their unit managers.

> *"I don't think at the time we had much preparation time. The forms had been around for quite a while but no one really engaged in the work. I think discussions were had in staff meetings. But actually getting ahead and doing the work, I think it wasn't seen as a priority."*

Despite stating that the preparation they had received was both very informal and limited in scope, four members of the group said they were satisfied with this. The other two respondents said they felt dissatisfied with the level of training they were given but did not raise these concerns with their line-manager at the time of implementing the materials nor did they subsequently seek additional training.

The relatively high degree of satisfaction expressed by the majority of the group appears to be linked to their low level of expectations about being trained. Most said that they had not expected to receive much substantive training, reflecting their general experience of having little training input in the job. Indeed, one of the workers did not have expectations about receiving *any* training for using the materials and another, who said that she felt ill-prepared for the task, evidently saw this as her own responsibility stating:

> *"I don't think I prepared myself a great deal for it."*

The group's satisfaction with their apparently inadequate preparation appears also to stem from the fact that they regarded the use of the materials as a predominantly procedural matter rather than as a complex method of working with young people. Thus staff approached the exercise with a very low level of anticipation about the degree of skill or knowledge required. Typifying the general views of the group, one informant regarded the process of using the AARs as a relatively unsophisticated activity and thought that additional training was unnecessary, declaring:

> *"I don't really think so... I mean if I recall rightly, it was a fairly straightforward thing to do once you got hold of the kid and you actually*

sort of asked them "who was your guidance teacher? what subjects are you doing?" But you don't need a month to sort it out..."

Only one of the six staff thought that more preparation would have been useful, reinforcing the inference that using the LAC materials was viewed primarily as a procedural exercise. In this worker's view, additional preparation would have provided more understanding of the purpose and function of the LAC materials and how they could fit into his work with young people. While this worker appeared to be aware of the need to integrate the materials into the overall care arrangements for the young people, neither he nor any of the others were clear about the child development principles underlying the approach or the methods and skills required to implement them effectively.

In short, the group were ill prepared for the task, had little or no expectations about receiving training and had a low level of understanding about the demands the materials would make on their practice.

The Process of Completing the Materials

Interviewees were asked about who was involved in the process of completing the AARs, how they undertook the work and how much time they devoted to the activity. Their descriptions of the manner in which they approached the task underlined the finding that they lacked even a basic appreciation of the primary purpose of the materials. Not only did they not devote a great deal of time to the activity but their comments also confirmed that they viewed the task as a largely practical function - as a form-filling exercise.

From the responses given, it was clear that none of the residential staff had involved teachers in the work of completing the AARs with the young people. Indeed, there was little evidence that any other individuals, such as family or previous carers, were involved. Consequently, there was no indication that the staff had used the Assessment and Action Record to provide a focus for in-depth discussions with the young people and others about their educational experiences. Rather, as the

following comment illustrates, the information required for the AAR was usually collected and recorded in a single sitting, with the residential workers adopting a perfunctory approach.

> *"I think to the best of my recollection we actually completed it quite quickly. More or less as a single event or maybe over a couple of days but it certainly wasn't over an extended period of time. A few hours I would think."*

Some staff encountered a negative reaction on the part of the young people and this led to difficulties in completing the work. In part, this appears to be because staff did not implement the process in a measured and sensitive way. The following response, for instance, encapsulates a number of concerns which one member of staff identified. These include the young person's feelings of intimidation about completing the forms, his unwillingness to engage with the member of staff and his general hostility towards the process.

> *"As far as I remember it was fairly rushed. I think (young person) was quite overawed by the fact that it was quite a big form, a bit intimidated by that. And I think that's also to do with how it fits into what was going on for him. If we had perhaps done it in a care planning meeting or as part of that, as a way in to get the plan of care established, it would have worked. Whereas it was just (young person) and I in the living room, going through it. As far as I remember we done the bulk of it in one go. (Young person) was very difficult to engage with as far as this was concerned and as far as lots of things were concerned. We probably spent about an hour but then there was time before that kind of trying to pin him down, you know 'Come on (young person), don't do this, we'll do that.' Took a while to actually get him to sit and do it but then once he was there he was quite hostile throughout, filling out some of it."*

This example highlights both the inexperience of the worker in managing the process and also the potential for young people to react in a non-cooperative or hostile manner. Were this to be typical of the style of implementation or of the responses of a significant proportion of young people it would have serious implications for the successful implementation of the LAC materials.

Though none of the residential staff had engaged teachers in the process of the work, a recurring theme in their comments was the futility of using the materials without the active involvement of education professionals. Some of them found that difficulties in relationships with the young people's schools had hindered the work. In one case, where the young person was excluded from school, the worker stated that it was very difficult to connect with the school to actually get anything done and she thought that the school staff were reticent to be involved because they had "been through the mill" with the young person. Another worker said there were problems in obtaining basic information such as the young person's school report (which was necessary for completing aspects of the form) and also in establishing a common understanding with the school about the purpose of the materials.

> *"No, no. We had a lot of difficulty with the form because for part of it we were to get a school report and that was really difficult to achieve. But there wasn't anybody else involved in this bit because the school didn't seem to understand at all so that was really difficult. They couldn't understand why we needed it, even though we had explained several times to several people, it became very difficult."*

Although no schoolteachers had been involved in completing any of the Assessment and Action Records in this study, there was general consensus among the residential staff that, wherever possible, school staff *should* contribute to the process. Respondents were confident that the information teachers would bring to the experience would improve care planning.

> *"I think if we're discussing a young person's education it would be fairly helpful to have a teacher who had some knowledge of (young person) within the school, because although we know (young person), we know him within the context of the YPC so if you're looking at educational needs then really we need someone who knows him in the classroom."*

The structure and Relevance of the Materials

The respondents generally welcomed the structure of the Assessment and Action Record and valued the systematic approach it encouraged. Indeed one of the group

thought that this was probably the best thing about the LAC materials. Another commented on how she found that the framework helped her to address matters that otherwise may not be have been attended to in the care setting and to realise that the materials raised issues that were not always in the forefront of her mind.

Adopting a structured assessment framework was also seen as particularly helpful because it afforded time to the young people to consider their schooling and it encouraged staff to become involved in that area of the young person's world. In the main, it was thought that the AAR promoted a child centred approach and that it raised the priority of education in the young person's life. Without such a systematic approach it was feared that school issues were not addressed in a sufficiently rigorous way.

However, not all views were positive. In one case, a member of staff experienced considerable antagonism from one of the young people who regarded the experience of being questioned about his schooling as 'annoying'. The factor which most contributed to this reaction appears to have been the repetitive nature of the materials. In particular, the youngster had expressed concern about being repeatedly asked "what action was taken?" or "what further action was required?" when difficulties were highlighted at different stages in the form. Thus while some staff found the highly structured feature of the materials rigorous, it appears to have led to consternation for one young person because the focus of the questioning was reinforcing his sense of failure.

Staff had mixed views about whether the young people had difficulty comprehending the relevance of the materials. Some of the workers were confident that the young people understood what was being asked and the reasons why. The majority were also confident that the young people could complete the forms with minimal support. One of the group was particularly positive about the AAR's accessibility to young people and felt that although the scale of the document was perhaps intimidating from the young person's perspective, it was nevertheless pitched at an appropriate level for the young person to understand.

"I think it was quite accessible, quite easy to fill out. Don't know whether it would be easier to break it down into smaller sections so it wasn't quite as intimidating because it's quite a big form to sit down with a young person. But certainly the questions seemed easy enough to ask and for (young person) to understand."

Some of the staff thought, however, that the materials were too daunting for the young people and suggested that they would need considerable assistance to complete them. Their comments implied that the general level of support required by young people would be high, not just in terms of being able to understand some of the basic aspects of the questions that were asked but also in terms of managing the process.

"I think most kids would need assistance with it. I think partly because they tend to be frightened - I was going to say frightened - but cautious about it."

"If she was to read it herself then I think she would find some of the questions quite difficult to answer but with me, sitting down and talking to and chatting to her basically what it was about, and if she says "What does this actually mean?" to try my best, try to explain to her and she kind of got the idea."

One area of particular concern to some of the staff was whether the Assessment and Action Record served a useful function for young people who were excluded from, or not attending, school. The respondents were unable to see how, in such circumstances, the AAR could be used as a means of identifying a young person's educational needs and directing appropriate action to meet these needs.

The group also expressed concern regarding whether the young people themselves would see any relevance or purpose to the material if they were not in school. Indeed, this theme arose in several contexts, raising doubts about the usefulness of the approach with those young people who were most alienated from the education system. In relation to one young person, a worker stated:

"...The schools just wouldn't accept him. ...if you have a kid like (young person) who's out of school for so many years, and made to feel totally rejected by the education system... he's sitting saying to himself well I don't need their help. You know what I mean? He's already negative on it, saying I don't need school, what do I need school for? I don't know how you could change that round."

However, in another case where the young person was attending school the worker was confident that the materials were relevant for looked after children because, in her view, looked after young people:

"...sometimes just accept a decision without taking any further action or without thinking that further action could be taken, so in fact it made them have a good long think about who would take further action or why it would be possible or even necessary to take further action."

Co-ordinating Education Arrangements with Schools

Respondents held mixed views on the question of whether the LAC materials made a positive contribution to co-ordinating the education arrangements of the young people. In the main, the differences of opinion expressed by the group highlighted serious questions about whether the materials would substantially alter the quality of future practice, particularly in the most difficult cases where young people were either excluded from school or refusing to attend.

Two were unequivocal in their view that the AARs *did not* improve co-ordination, though for quite different reasons. The first indicated that the field social worker had an excellent relationship with the young person's school and was already doing a very good job. In this instance, she felt that the materials did not improve the quality of practice that was already being undertaken suggesting, rather, that good co-ordination relies upon the skill and motivation of the professionals involved more-so than the structure and consistency of the assessment tool. The clear implication being that the AAR would not be useful in the hands of staff who were not committed to improving relationships with their education colleagues.

The second respondent found that completing the AAR had not helped to improve the school arrangements of one young person who was between school placements. In this particular case social work staff were frustrated by the delays the young person was experiencing in the process of transition from one school to another. The member of staff identified poor communication between the two schools as the main source of the problem. Thus, because there was not a named teacher for the residential worker to liaise with, neither of the schools became involved in working with the LAC materials. The worker stated that merely completing the materials without appropriate school participation was insufficient to resolve the young person's difficulties.

The latter case highlighted general apprehension on the part of staff about the likelihood of being able to use the materials constructively in those cases where young people are not enrolled in a school. This disquiet was specifically reflected in the comments of one member of the group who thought that working with staff in schools was not the central issue for those young people who are excluded from school. Rather the question, in his opinion, is about gaining access to senior education officials who exercise the power to allocate a resource. In these cases, the worker stated,

> *"It's looking for a school that's the issue rather than what's happening at school. In fact, lots of times that's what the issue is, trying to get one."*

Not all of the respondents held such pessimistic attitudes about the limitations of the materials. One had particularly appreciated the way that using the AAR had helped her to make a worthwhile contribution at both a child-care review and in a children's hearing. In this case the young person's schooling was extremely problematic and the resultant decision was for the young person to attend residential school. The worker felt that using the AAR had helped to focus the discussion and had clarified important issues.

In another case, the worker thought that the materials were particularly helpful because they enabled the young person to participate more fully in discussions with care staff. For this worker, the ability to bring the young person 'on board' with the decision-making had been an important factor in moving to a more satisfactory arrangement.

Two workers were very ambivalent about the value of using the materials for co-ordinating school arrangements. One suggested that the fundamental issue was not about completing an assessment and action record but about how staff 'operate' in relation to the young person's education. This worker emphasised the importance of engaging with both the young person and the school but she did not equate this process with using the AAR. Rather, her response indicated that she viewed the materials largely as procedural forms.

Another respondent also expressed doubt about the value of the AAR for co-ordinating school arrangements but suggested that this was primarily because the school was not familiar with the material and was therefore less engaged with the process. She commented that if the school had been more involved it would have made a positive difference.

Engaging Young People and Their Parents in Educational Arrangements

Respondents did not feel that parents became more involved in discussions or plans about the young people's education as a consequence of using the materials. The reasons for this were varied and reflected differing circumstances among the young people. In one case, the young person's father (the primary carer) had recently died and the girl had no contact with her mother. The girl's grandparents and extended family were the main point of contact with the residential unit and they apparently had taken little interest in, or involvement with, school matters.

In several cases the main problem described by staff was that there were very poor relationships between the young people and their parents. Respondents stated that some parents did not wish to have involvement with their children, "no matter what the format of the form was". Indeed rejection by their parents was regarded as a common issue for a number of the young people. For some of the staff though, the difficulty stemmed from the fact that it was the young people who were hostile to their parent's being more involved.

> *"The parents were consulted but at that particular time this girl wasn't speaking to her parents so that made it more complicated. ...It was a particular time when they were both very hostile about each other so I don't know if anything would have improved that at that time."*

Though respondents thought that, in this study, the AAR had not encouraged greater parental participation, they nevertheless held the view that it remained a potentially positive feature of the materials. Staff believed that both they and the parents were trying to achieve better educational outcomes for the youngsters and they considered that the AAR could provide a valuable focus where circumstances were more receptive to the process. For most, however, the crucial factor was the motivation of the parents.

> *"...it depends on the parent that you're working with, how much they want to be involved with the child."*

By contrast with their experience of working with the parents, there was unanimous agreement among the respondents that the materials were useful for engaging with young people and helping them to talk about their education. Using the materials with the young people was valued for different reasons. In one case the worker commented on how much the young person enjoyed the personal contact and appreciated spending time on the issue. Another worker noted how it helped the young person to realise that issues could be challenged and things done differently.

> *"Well it certainly made her think because, like I said, before where she would just accept a situation in school... this (the AAR) made her think she wouldn't have to accept any given situation. ... We actually talked*

about where it would be possible for her to do homework. About would it be better for her to do it at school because here, when she comes home from school we've got caught up in other things and she wasn't interested. Other kids wouldn't be doing homework so she'd refuse to do homework as well. So we did discuss that and how we could go about, you know, a better structure for her homework."

In this instance, the materials served to address an important practical issue – that of providing a structured context for doing homework. They also highlighted the need for greater communication between the residential unit and the school in those circumstances where there are difficulties managing the requirements placed on young people. Indeed, the question of managing homework was also an issue in another case and the worker commented on how the prevailing culture of the unit militated against young people making good progress at school.

"If a kid's doing well at school and comes back in here, ... sometimes it can happen that you can be dealing with other kids who find it difficult and really you should be asking these kids "How was school?" "Did you get any homework?" and basically "Did you have a good day?" That doesn't happen a lot of the time."

In this particular case, the materials provided an opportunity for the worker to change his practice and he thought that using the materials could help to change young people's attitudes.

"...you've got times like this and you're sitting down, you're talking about school, some kids might think well, this is great, he's talking to me, or he or she is talking to me about the school."

Reflecting on the general tendency for professionals to focus on the young person's behaviour and attendance problems, another respondent thought the materials were useful because they adopted a structure that highlighted positive factors as well as the difficulties. In this case the worker found that the young person was happy to engage with the work because it didn't become a chore that was solely focused on the difficulties in her school situation.

Inter-Agency Roles and Responsibilities

All of the respondents felt that the materials were useful for clarifying professional roles and responsibilities. A major issue arising in interview was the concern among staff about residential units being used as the 'dumping ground' for youngsters who were having difficulty fitting into routine school arrangements. One respondent thought that responsibility for these young people always seemed to come back to the residential workers and she considered that the AAR helped to clarify what the role of other professionals ought to be. Another who thought the materials were helpful echoed this point, noting that the AAR identified who should take responsibility for different aspects of the case.

Although one of the workers expressed some concern that the format of the materials emphasised a tick box approach, she nevertheless acknowledged that they facilitated a sense of agreement about shared responsibilities and helped to clarify from the outset who was responsible for aspects of the young person's education plan.

Another of the positives identified by the respondents related to their sense of uncertainty about the boundaries and limits of their role. As the following comment illustrates, staff experienced uncertainty about whether it was appropriate for them to initiate action to engage other professional support when dealing with the young people's educational difficulties:

> *"...sometimes it's not very clear at what point you can ask for an educational psychologist to be involved and who is the person who is going to decide that as well. And sometimes we might have felt it would have been helpful earlier but other people have said that it wasn't necessary so the role of the educational psychologist isn't very clear for us. If we were working with them with these (the AARs) it would be a lot clearer."*

Staff also felt that the AAR was a useful tool because it promoted a pro-active approach and provided clarity about where responsibility lay among professionals for ensuring that action was being taken. One respondent pinpointed a particular concern

about the degree of drift and uncertainty many young people experience and reinforced the need for closer working relationships between the relevant professionals.

> *"... in the situation where a kid is hanging around for two or three months... we need to find a way to avoid the drift and get us out the other end. I think it also needs to be more clear who is responsible... because part of the reason for the drift, I think, is the adult partnerships with people not really knowing what they should be doing or ignoring what they should be doing."*

Assessing, Planning and Reviewing the Young People's Educational Arrangements

Respondents identified a degree of discord between the materials' *potential* value as instruments for assessing, planning and reviewing young people's education needs and their *actual* contribution to practice. The concerns expressed by staff were mainly centred on two areas. First, as previously noted, there was some disquiet concerning the possibility that a proportion of young people would be unwilling or unable to engage with the process. In particular respondents thought that staff would experience difficulties in using the materials for assessing the needs of those young people who were not interested in going to school. It was thought that these youngsters would not co-operate in the process and, certainly, one of the six young people who used the materials in this study demonstrated strong resistance to them.

Second, respondents expressed concern about teachers' and schools' failure to fully demonstrate involvement with, and commitment to, the activity. In their view, if teachers do not become actively involved in the process in future there is a very strong likelihood that the system will fail.

Assessment

Notwithstanding these reservations, respondent's also noted several positive views about the value of using the materials for assessment purposes. It was stated, for example, that the AAR highlights the strengths as well as the problem areas in a young person's education and also that the assessment deals 'in depth' with matters relating to his/her school and educational development. It was also stated that the AAR brought a degree of 'uniformity' to their work with young people and helped everyone involved to "work along the same lines". One of the workers stated, optimistically, that using the materials more systematically in the future would perhaps lead to greater emphasis being placed on assessing the educational needs of looked after children.

Planning

Alongside the general view that the materials were useful for assessment purposes, there was broad agreement that they could also be useful in facilitating plans for the young people's education. The practical nature of the approach adopted in the materials was particularly welcomed. One respondent thought that the AAR would certainly provide a more systematic focus for working on the young people's education plans. Several of the staff welcomed the fact that the AAR identified what further action was required and who would be responsible for ensuring that the action was taken.

One of the workers thought that a particular merit of the AAR was that it encouraged plans to be built on the young person's strengths and interests rather than focusing on problems. He stated that if he could get the young person back into school he would use the materials:

> *"...so that the timetable's built around what he can do rather than what he can't do".*

The question of whether the young person was attending school or not was critical for some. One worker felt that using the AAR had not helped to make plans for one

of the young people because she was between schools and it had not been possible to get reports from either of the schools. However, having school staff involved in the planning process whenever possible was seen as vital, prompting one worker to state:

> *"If I was using them again it would be a better idea to involve everybody that was involved in the education side of it."*

Reviews

None of the staff had used the materials *formally* as a basis for discussions in child care reviews although one said that she found it helped to have completed the AAR because it had then strengthened her contribution to the discussion of the young person's education in a review meeting.

Although they had not been central to the review process during the study, all of the respondents thought that, ideally, the AARs should form the basis for discussions about young people's education in future child-care reviews. Two said that they would be an improvement on the current practice of obtaining reports from school because these reports were usually narrow in their focus, dealing mainly with whether the young person was attending or not. As one said:

> *"They tend to be, "She does/she does not attend school regularly. She's getting on all right as far as we know." And that's really it."*

Echoing this view, one worker thought that the AAR would encourage much broader discussion of the young person's educational needs and that a greater degree of structure would result in raising the priority given to education:

> *"I think this would be very useful to be able to have a section in the review that's about their education because we do cover education routinely but I think we maybe lack clarity within that. It's like they're either OK or it's not going well. If it's not going well we maybe look a wee bit more at that but it's maybe not getting to the meat, getting down to what is the problem or where they're going with it... I think certainly we explore more where there's problems but I've never been in a review where we've discussed perhaps things like a young person's choice for subjects or positive moves within the school regime, or their school career... where do you see*

yourself being next year? How can we help you with that? Who's helping you with this? Where are you going to go with that? ... There's no structure to our approach, to actually giving it the place it really deserves you know."

While acknowledging the potential value of using the AAR for planning and review purposes, two notes of caution were sounded. First, one worker thought that completing the AAR would be pointless if teachers did not come to the child-care reviews and engage in the planning process. This point reflected a general concern expressed by other respondents about the inadequacy of the written information that schools supplied when teachers did not attend the reviews. One worker speculated that teachers did not give much priority to this task because it was centred in the social work system.

The second cautionary note concerned the possibility that young people would feel alienated from the review discussion because the materials were too formal for them. Certainly, concern about young people's ability or willingness to engage with the process arose in several of the interviews.

Summary

- Staff who used the AARs in this study were ill prepared for the task. They had low expectations about the demands the materials would make on their practice and had no expectations about receiving training.

- Staff lacked a basic appreciation of the primary purpose of the materials and they did not devote a great deal of time to the process because they approached the task as a form-filling exercise. This despite the fact that evidence from earlier research (Ward, 1995) suggests that the looking after children materials are neither as time consuming to use nor as costly as critics had anticipated.

- There was little evidence that the Assessment and Action Record was used as a working tool to provide a focus for in-depth discussions with the young people about their educational experiences. Neither did staff involve other individuals, such as family and schools, in completing the materials.

- Staff encountered a negative reaction on the part of some young people and this led to difficulties in completing the work. Their comments indicate that there is a need to provide young people with preparation regarding the purpose and function of the materials. Given the limited training that the carers had themselves received, their ability to undertake this task effectively is open to question.

- The futility of using the materials without the active involvement of teachers was a recurring theme. The general consensus among the group was that, wherever possible, school teachers *should* contribute to the process.

- The structure of the material was welcomed and staff valued the systematic approach it encouraged. The structure was seen as particularly helpful because:

➢ It affords time to the young people to consider their schooling
➢ It encourages staff to become more involved in that area of the young person's world
➢ It promotes a child centred approach
➢ It raises the priority of education in the young person's life.

- While staff were confident that the material was pitched at an appropriate level for the majority of the young people and that they could complete the records with minimal assistance, it was felt that many young people would need a lot of support.

- Staff were not convinced that the Assessment and Action Record is a useful or relevant tool for working with young people who are excluded from, or truanting from, school. Concern was also expressed regarding whether the young people themselves would see any relevance or purpose to the material if they are not in school.

- Similar apprehension was expressed about not being able to use the materials constructively in those cases where young people are not enrolled in a school. This was because of problems in identifying an appropriate link person. Ward (1995) found that questions in the education section of the AAR were often disregarded if the young person was not attending school and when a looked after child was excluded from school it appeared that no-one took on responsibility for compensatory action.

- For some, the key concern in those cases where young people are excluded from school is about accessing senior education officials regarding the allocation of a school placement. It was unclear to staff how the materials help in this respect.

- One of the staff welcomed the opportunity created by the materials to bring a young person 'on board' with the decision-making process. It was felt that the materials enabled the young person to participate more fully in discussions and this had been an important factor in moving to a more satisfactory arrangement.

- Involving school staff in the process of completing the materials was seen as vital and residential workers highlighted the need to prepare teachers fully in the implementation of the materials. However, in this research and in previous research it has been noted that training has been largely geared to field social workers and that significant groups, like residential workers, have been absent or poorly represented and that there has also been a general

failure to engage professionals beyond social work services (Wheelaghan *et al*, 1999).

- Staff did not feel that parents were more fully involved in discussions or plans about the young people's education as a consequence of using the materials. The main problem is that there are often very poor relationships between the young people and their parents and parents often fail to take an active interest in their child's progress.

- There was almost unanimous agreement among the respondents that the materials are useful for engaging with young people and helping them to talk about their education. Various reasons were given for this including:

➢ The young people enjoy the personal contact and appreciate spending time on the issue
➢ It helps the young people to realise that issues can be challenged and things done differently
➢ Using the materials can help to change young people's attitudes
➢ The materials entail a structure that highlights positive factors as well as the difficulties

- Staff felt that the materials were useful for clarifying professional roles and responsibilities. This was particularly important because a major issue is the concern that residential units are being used as a dumping ground for youngsters who are having difficulty fitting into routine educational arrangements.

- Though some concern was expressed that the format of the materials emphasised a tick box approach, nevertheless it was acknowledged that they:

➢ Promote a pro-active approach
➢ Facilitate a sense of agreement about shared responsibilities

- Clarify from the outset who is responsible for aspects of the young person's education plan
- Ensure that action is being taken

- Respondents highlighted a degree of discord between the materials' *potential* value as instruments for assessing, planning and reviewing young people's education needs and their *actual* contribution to practice. Two main reasons were given for this. First, the fact that a proportion of young people will be unwilling or unable to engage with the process. Second, teachers' and schools' failure to demonstrate full involvement with, and commitment to, the activity.

CHAPTER NINE

DISCUSSION OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

Introduction

The results of the study have been described in some detail in the last few chapters. This chapter now highlights and discusses key aspects of the findings and considers what can be inferred from the themes that have emerged from analysis of the data. The chapter concludes by indicating that one issue, school exclusion, merits particular attention and this is discussed more extensively in chapter ten.

Reiteration of the Purpose of the Study

Research indicates that children looked after away from home are at a particular educational disadvantage. In comparison with their peers they tend to be behind in their attainments, leave school with fewer qualifications and be more at risk of being excluded from school (HMI/SWSI, 2001). This study therefore sought to consider how a small sample of young people in residential care was faring educationally and whether the Looking After Children materials made a positive contribution to the educational progress of a sub-set of the study sample.

The specific aims of the investigation fell into two broad areas. The first of these relates to the pre-care and in-care experiences of the group and the goals identified were:

- To examine and describe the level and degree of educational difficulty that a group of young people in residential care brought to their care episode

- To consider how their educational circumstances and performance were affected by their care experience

- The second area the study was concerned with was the extent to which the Looking After Children, Assessment and Action Records (AARs) affected the educational experiences of the young people. The aims identified here were:

- To evaluate the *effectiveness* of the education component of the Assessment and Action Record (AAR) in relation to the educational progress of a sub-set of the young people.
- To examine the views and experiences of the carers responsible for implementing the approach in order to gain some insight into the *process* of using the AAR materials and the potential benefits, deficits, obstacles and rewards for the young people concerned.

The degree to which these aims were met during the investigation is mixed, reflecting variations in the quality of available information across the study sample and highlighting a general concern about the standard of record keeping in both social work and education departments in the study authority. This issue is addressed in the first section of this chapter.

Notwithstanding the problems that arose as a consequence of poor record keeping, the details obtained during the conduct of the study provide a rich picture of the experiences and backgrounds of the young people in the data set together with important insights into their in-care experience so far as it relates to their education. The most significant features of these findings are discussed in the second section.

Finally, data arising from interviews with the care workers enabled the writer to document the views of staff in residential settings regarding the application of these materials and their potential value for enhancing the educational outcomes of

children in public care. Key aspects of these views are considered in some detail in this chapter.

Record-Keeping and Information Exchange

The study has highlighted three particular points about record-keeping and inter-agency communication regarding the educational arrangements of the young people in the sample. They are:

- The standard of record keeping in both the social work and education departments of the study authority was generally poor
- Communication between the residential units and the schools was not of a high standard and exchange of vital information such as the young people's school reports did not occur routinely
- There was little evidence that residential care staff asked for, or discussed, the young people's school progress reports, thus raising doubts about the level of priority they afforded to education in the young people's care arrangements.

Record Keeping

As explained in chapter four, a number of circumstances beyond the investigator's control made it difficult to pursue all of the study aims to a satisfactory conclusion. The most significant of these difficulties was the inability to unearth school reports from which to obtain comparative data for the purpose of measuring the impact of the LAC materials on the educational progress of the young people in the sample.

A criticism of the study might be that, in this area, the study's aspirations were over-ambitious and that placing such reliance on secondary sources of data was unwise. The writer acknowledges that the method adopted for this part of the study was predicated on the belief that while it was likely there would be problems obtaining school records for a proportion of the sample. Nevertheless, he was they would be available for the majority of the sample (even if they contained minimal information). This proved not to be so. However, on reflection, the writer believes it

was not unreasonable to hold such an expectation at the outset and he has consequently come to recognise that illuminating unexpected outcomes in research is a valid part of the process of investigation. In fact, despite the initial frustration and disappointment arising from this unforeseen difficulty, the researcher believes that this is one of the important findings of the study, reflecting, as it does, shortcomings in the maintenance and monitoring of school records for children in public care - a matter that has been emphasised elsewhere in recent literature (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001).

The problem of poor record keeping was not restricted solely to the school records of the young people. The method of data collection used in the study also highlighted an apparent lack of essential and basic information in many of the young people's care records and demonstrates that staff responsible for their day-to-day care were not always in possession of important details concerning their personal histories, family backgrounds or current family circumstances. For example, as was seen in chapter 5, there was a lack of important data about aspects of the young people's physical, intellectual and psychological well-being.

Absence of important information about the young people's health and psychological welfare is significant not only because of the obvious implications for their health care needs, but also because such factors may have a profound effect on their educational performance (DoH, 2000). A similar concern has been identified in another recent study of young people in residential care where it was found that 54% of the young people had no written health assessment on their care records, only 40% of the records had details of the young people's GP and only 12% had details of any past medical history. In that study, only 27% of 105 young people in the sample were in mainstream schools, 7% were excluded from school and 50% had attended 5 or more schools (Residential Care Health Project, 2004).

Interestingly, in the aforementioned study, it was also found that just 13% of the care records had mention of mental health problems and only 3% had details of emotional and behavioural problems, this despite the fact that comprehensive health

assessments of the group found that the majority were experiencing psychological distress and emotional or behavioural difficulties. It is widely recognised that there is a high prevalence of mental health and behavioural problems in looked after children, particularly in residential units (Dimigen *et al.,* 1999; McCann *et al.,* 1996) and these factors have a major bearing on their educational performance.

In the study reported here, alongside the absence of important information about aspects of the young people's lives such as their physical and emotional well-being, the quality of information held in the case records about their school experiences was very poor. In fact, although school problems featured in the majority of cases in the sample, and were often among the factors that led to social work involvement, it was either difficult or impossible to obtain accurate details of the young person's education experiences in three-quarters of the cases.

Fletcher-Campbell (1997) has previously voiced concern about the lack of relevant information in case records, finding that professionals are often living on part knowledge of cases and that information systems are not designed to yield information that is essential to enhancing the educational performance of looked-after children. Similarly, difficulties concerning recording systems were noted in another recent study of 17 young people in residential care (Brodie, 2001), with evidence of great variety in the quality of recorded details of the care and education histories of the youngsters in the study sample. In one case, Brodie states that the educational history of the young person had effectively vanished, an experience that was not uncommon among the sample reported here.

Clearly, the issue of collecting and managing key information about young people in public care is crucial to the process of assessing their needs and then planning for effective intervention. In his review of children in public care in England and Wales, Utting (1997) noted that poor record keeping led to difficulty knowing how decisions were made, a point that could equally be made in this study. Moreover, the fact that it was not possible for the researcher to obtain copies of the majority of the school reports suggests that it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for staff to make

appropriate arrangements for the young people's education whilst in care. This raises two important points. The first of these is that the failure of the education authority to maintain up-to-date school records for children in public care appears to reflect a poor level of communication and information exchange between the social work department and the education department. The second point is that staff in the social work department appear to have afforded a very low level of priority to the educational performance of children in their care since the degree of information held on care records about the young people's education was very poor.

Inter- Agency Information Exchange

With regard to the first of these points, the evidence in this study indicates that routine communication and information exchange between the residential units and the schools was not firmly established as a matter of good practice. For example, when the manager of one of the residential units wrote to a head-teacher for the school report of one of the young people in the unit's care, the head-teacher refused to supply it as he did not wish the information to be shared with the researcher. As well as demonstrating that the residential unit did not routinely hold copies of school reports on the young people's care files, this example also indicates that there was not an established working relationship between the residential unit and the school. The absence of such a relationship in this case meant that the school was not willing to trust information to the residential unit. This example suggests that the principle of corporate parenting was not being applied in practice and was one of several examples which indicated that there was a poor level of collaboration and communication between schools and residential units.

The findings reported here add to a growing body of evidence which shows that exchange of key information, such as school reports, between frontline education and social work staff does not always happen. The poor standard of information exchange between social work and education has been raised as a concern in other studies (Borland *et al.,* 1998). In a recent Scottish Executive inspection (HMI/SWSI, 2001), it was found that most social work files had little or no information about which schools children had previously attended or about their educational progress.

Neither did the files contain copies of the children's school reports. The breakdown in effective communication appears to operate in both directions and it has been suggested elsewhere in the literature (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001) that, while information about young people's school progress is not always passed to social workers and carers, similarly social work systems do not always ensure that details about young people in care are passed on to schools. Thus, schools are often unaware of when pupils become looked after or change care placements.

The latter point may help to explain why, in the majority of cases in this study, it was not possible for the education authority to trace the school records of the young people concerned. In fact, as stated earlier, despite attempting to acquire school reports via the residential units and then by asking the manager of the children in care educational support service to track them down, it only proved possible to obtain reports for six of the twenty-eight young people in the study sample.

Currently, The Arrangements to Look After Children (Scotland) Regulations 1996 require local authorities to notify the education authority when a child becomes looked after unless it is expected that the placement will last less than twenty-eight days (Regulation 7). It is anticipated that such notification will ensure that effective communication between the two parties is established from the outset of a child's placement. However, based on the evidence obtained in this and other recent studies in the UK (as indicated above), it appears that information may not be routinely exchanged between the agencies and that there is still considerable scope for translating what is required in legislation into what is happening in day-to-day practice.

As detailed in chapter three, regulations associated with the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (The Scottish Office, 1997) specify the matters that must be given regard in drawing up the care plan for each looked after child and among these is the duty to consider the means of meeting any educational need and the means of achieving continuity in a child's education. It is difficult to see how this can occur without

improved systems and procedures to ensure that information is routinely shared between the two key players, social work and education.

Prioritising Education

As the findings discussed above indicate, it is clear that the majority of residential care staff in this study did not habitually gather information about the educational progress of the young people in their care. For example, when asked to furnish the young people's school reports, one of the residential units did not have copies and instead provided the researcher with a list of the schools that the youngsters attended and invited him to obtain the reports from the schools. It was evident from this response that copies of the school reports were not held on the young people's case files and that staff in the unit did not routinely obtain these reports as a matter of good practice. In this respect, and insofar as it reflects the broader picture for the study as a whole, there is little to suggest that taking an active interest in the young people's progress at school was regarded as an important task by these workers.

As illustrated in the literature review, this does not appear to be a concern that is confined to isolated pockets of practice or specific geographical locations, since previous studies (e.g. Aldgate *et* al., 1993; Francis *et al.,* 1996; Knapp *et al.,* 1985) have cast doubt on the importance that social workers and carers attach to attending to young people's education. Accounts of children who have been placed in public care indicate that they have experienced indifference from social workers and carers in relation to their education (Borland, 1998). More recent research (Harker *et al,* 2003) suggests that the picture has not greatly improved so far as residential care staff are concerned, finding that foster carers are more likely to support young people's education than social workers or residential carers.

While it is acknowledged that the findings reported in this study relate to practice that occurred immediately prior to the implementation in April 1997 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, nevertheless findings from the latest investigation into the outcomes of care leavers in Scotland (Dixon and Stein, 2002) suggest that the standard of educational attainment for this group of young people remains at a

particularly low level and one of the reasons for this may be that a substantial proportion of social workers and carers still do not afford education a high priority. In Dixon and Stein's study (ibid) a quarter of support workers were unaware of the educational attainment of the young person with whom they were working.

There is evidence then, that although recent legislation has placed specific obligations on local authorities regarding information gathering, assessment and planning for looked after children (as detailed in chapter three) these obligations are not being fulfilled in every instance. In particular, it appears that social workers and carers may be failing in the duty to gather information about looked after children's education history and current arrangements for the provision of their education, as required in Schedule 1 (The Scottish Office, 1997).

Despite increased political and professional emphasis on improving the educational outcomes for this group of young people, the evidence obtained in this study supports the conclusion reached elsewhere that social workers and carers need to raise the priority of education among the range of issues that they attend to in their work with young people in public care. Obtaining school reports on a regular basis would represent an important first step towards this objective. Indeed, the aim of raising the educational performance of children in public care will remain a forlorn one if the educational progress of young people continues to be given low priority and if those concerned with their day-to day care fail to regularly obtain copies of school reports as a matter of good practice. Of course, obtaining the reports is not, of itself, sufficient to raise levels of attainment. It is how the reports are used that is important and it should be recognised that they offer only a minimum basis for monitoring progress and facilitating discussion with young people about their educational performance and needs. Much more needs to be undertaken with the young people, with their families and with their schools and this requires effective organisational systems, rigorous procedures and good relationships between schools and residential care staff at local level.

To summarise this part of the discussion then, important aspects of the school experiences of the young people in this study proved elusive and the writer acknowledges that some of the study's aims therefore remain uncertain or untested. In the writer's view, the inability to fully examine all of the young people's circumstances reflects poorly on the standards of record keeping in the education and social work departments of the study authority at the time of the investigation. There is evidence that this remains a problem at national level and that the difficulty experienced in this study echoes a concern that has been experienced more widely about the standard of record keeping in the school and care systems so far as looked after children are concerned.

For example, recent literature (Brodie, 2001; Jackson and Sachdev, 2001; HMI/SWSI, 2001) has drawn attention to the poor quality of social work records in terms of accuracy, detail, legibility and how up to date they are. As with this study, an inspection of the education arrangements for looked after children in 5 local authorities in Scotland (HMI/SWSI, 2001) reported that it was not always easy to find which school a child currently attended, the contact people there or their telephone numbers. Where information was recorded it was sometimes out of date and most files had little or no information about the schools the child had previously attended or about their educational progress. Most did not contain school reports, although in all the cases inspected these had been sent to each child's carer.

The writer is aware that many local authorities have found it costly to introduce, or extend, the use of information technology across all services and this has undoubtedly hindered progress on this matter. However, even where information technology has been used, the problem of poor recording and poor communication between social work and education services does not appear to have been alleviated and it has been suggested (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001) that this is because education authorities often have no means of recording that a young person is looked after and social work departments do not always include a field on their databases to record school details.

Failures in gathering, recording, managing and communicating information by and between relevant agencies are clearly important issues that merit urgent attention in policy and practice.

Pre-Care and In-Care Experiences of the Young People.

The findings concerning the young people's education experience during the study period indicate that there are several critical pre-care and in-care factors that need to be taken into account in policy and practice if better outcomes are to be achieved. These are:

- The impact of Poverty and Social Deprivation
- Factors leading to their care episodes
- Indications of problems at school prior to social work intervention
- Prevention and early intervention strategies
- The quality of inter-agency collaboration
- Corporate policy and practice post-placement

These matters are first explored in light of the study findings and some conclusions are then drawn about the reasons for ongoing school difficulties post-care placement.

Poverty and Social Deprivation

The study was concerned to examine the relationship between the young people's family backgrounds and their educational experience. The literature discussed in chapter two provides strong evidence that children who are placed in public care are often multiply disadvantaged and tend to come from families that are characterised by marital discord and breakdown, poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing, health problems, overcrowding, social isolation and other forms of social deprivation (see, for example, Bebbington and Miles, 1989; Berridge and Brodie, 1998; Brodie, 2001; Packman and Hall, 1998).

The families of the young people in this study reflected many of these characteristics. Only one-fifth of the young people came from families where both birth parents were present. A high proportion lived in reconfigured families and one-quarter lived in lone-parent families, none of which were lone fathers. It is clear from the data that, besides the lone-parent families, a high proportion of the young people in the sample had experienced major fragmentation in their family circumstances that had led to separation from one of their parents, usually the father.

Some research (Dennis and Erdos, 1992) suggests that lack of a stable family background, particularly the absence of fathers from the family home, leads to children having a poor educational experience. Furthermore, it has been suggested elsewhere in the literature that presence of the father in a child's family base is an important factor related to the existence or absence of protective resilience factors. In circumstances where children come from two parent households, where the father is in employment and where he takes an active role in encouraging the child's educational pursuits, the child has a greater chance of developing resilient qualities (Pilling, 1990).

Another factor that is likely to have had a bearing on the young people's educational progress is their families' socio-economic circumstances. Mortimore and Whitty (1997) recently reviewed the evidence on the relationship between educational achievement and social disadvantage and concluded that even where schools can be improved to raise achievement, the relative achievements of children from poor and more affluent families are not likely to change. The inference here is clearly that the underlying causes of poverty have to be addressed if real progress is to be made.

In those cases where details were known, more than half of the families in this investigation (58%, n=19) were reliant on welfare benefits as their sole source of income and the majority of them lived in rented accommodation. The connections between impoverished family and social circumstances and the degree of educational disadvantage experienced by children has been raised earlier (Bynner *et al.*, 2002)

and the evidence to date shows that this is a particular concern for children in local authority care (e.g. Aldgate *et al.*, 1992; Osborn and St. Clair, 1987).

The significance of the connection between poverty and educational achievement is important since children in residential care are invariably drawn from the most deprived and excluded families in society. In the writer's view, it will be extremely difficult to create circumstances that will promote better educational outcomes for these young people unless the matter is tackled on a structural level as well as making improvements in local policy and practice.

The question of whether special education policy should adopt a more inclusive stance was explored in some depth in chapter three and one related question arising from the findings reported here is whether the term 'special educational needs' should be defined more broadly in order to incorporate young people in residential care. This may prove difficult, however, given that the Warnock Committee was apparently forbidden to count social deprivation as in any way contributing to educational needs (Warnock, 1999).

In general, despite the clear association between poverty and poor school performance there has been a tendency in government policy to steer clear of such links, leading one commentator to note that a series of Conservative governments had succeeded in making it virtually illegitimate to talk about this relationship, while hopes of a New Labour government re-opening the debate have proved to be over-optimistic (Croll, 2002).

Factors Leading to Social Work Involvement

Many of the young people in the study were initially referred to the social work department because of multiple concerns rather than because of single issues. As with other research findings (Bebbington and Miles, 1989; Borland *et al.*, 1998; Packman *et al.*, 1986; Triseliotis *et al.*, 1995) the circumstances leading to them being looked after were usually complex and combined personal, family and environmental stresses.

Relationship problems with their parents were predominant among the issues cited, with nearly half of the group being described as 'beyond parental control'. However, behavioural difficulties at school were also common reasons for referral. Indeed the complexity of their circumstances suggests that school and family problems were often interwoven.

Besides the behavioural issues that the young people presented with, almost forty per cent were referred because of concerns about the poor standard of care they were receiving at home and a number of the girls were known to have experienced some form of abuse. Recent research (Berridge and Brodie, 1998) indicates that the level of abuse experienced by children entering residential care has increased and there is some evidence that educational performance is adversely affected by sexual abuse (Kendall-Tackett and Kaufman Kantor, 1993).

Studies that have examined the educational experiences of looked after children (e.g. Berridge and Brodie, 1998; Brodie, 2001; Francis *et al.,* 1996, Kendrick, 1995) suggest that the disadvantaged home circumstances and associated problems that are typical of many of the young people in this sample, are likely to have a serious detrimental effect in relation to their school performance. One commentator (Furlong, 1985) has argued that it is common sense that difficult pupils frequently come from difficult or unhappy homes. In light of the evidence that many of the young people came from disadvantaged and fragmented backgrounds, it was anticipated that there would be signs of earlier school problems in the lives of a number of the young people in this study and the findings show that this was indeed the case.

In fact, among other factors, a high proportion of the group (36%, n=28) were first referred to the social work department because of concerns that they were failing to attend school, making this the third most common factor in the reasons given for initial referral. Altogether, educational problems, including behavioural difficulties, were firmly established for at least half of the group before they became looked after

and pre-existing educational difficulties were important factors in relation to the process resulting in care arrangements in many of these cases.

The data examined here show that it is difficult to separate the young people's school difficulties from their wider family and social circumstances. Many in the sample experienced significant levels of disruption in terms of fragmented families, some were the victims of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, and a considerable number lived in fatherless households. Given these antecedents and the degree of deprivation and social exclusion outlined above, it is little wonder that aspects of their educational progress were adversely affected. The findings therefore support the conclusions of earlier studies that a high proportion of young people bring educational disadvantage into their care episodes and the researcher concurs with others who have called for additional and compensatory measures to support these young people.

Pre-Care School Experiences

As described above, the data show that there were signs of the harmful impact of poor home circumstances on many of the young people's education from an early age. The early school years of a high proportion of the group were characterised by instability and disruption. Many had experienced multiple school placements and seven of the young people had amassed a total of thirty-four previous school placements, most of which were of a relatively short duration. In one case, the reason for frequent changes of school was because of the family's relocation due to the father's employment. However, in the majority of cases where there were frequent moves there was evidence of behavioural difficulties and truancy. In fact, behaviour problems in early schooling were identified in almost half of the cases in the sample and, for most of these cases, the difficulties included 'non-attendance'. The data show that most of these young people subsequently experienced frequent changes of schools, suggesting that their problems were not easily resolved and that schools continued to have difficulty managing the problems presented by them. The data also show that for many of them a pattern of disruption and discontinuity endured throughout the rest of their school careers.

As with the findings of other investigations then (e.g. Aldgate *et al.*,1993; Francis *et al.*, 1996; Humberside County Council, 1995) a significant proportion of the young people in this study brought educational problems with them to their care placement and in several cases these problems had been recognised at a relatively early stage in their primary school careers. However, despite the early indications of school-related difficulty in almost half of the cases, only five young people in the sample were first referred when they were less than twelve years old. The majority were first referred to the social work department as teenagers and their parents were more likely to refer them than schools were.

For many in the sample, it appears that difficulties had reached crisis proportions by the time that they were referred to social work and in these cases placement in care followed quickly. Fletcher-Campbell (1997) found that the social service policy of minimal intervention in situations where education is an issue has often resulted in referrals being made at point of crisis rather than sooner. The question posed by these findings, therefore, is how school problems can be addressed at an earlier stage in the young people's lives.

The Role of Prevention and Early Intervention

As discussed above, the findings here and in a number of other studies (e.g. Brodie, 2001; Francis *et al.*, 1996; Heath *et al.*, 1994) indicate that young people bring educational disadvantage with them to their care placement and Kendrick (1995a) found that children's panel members and residential care staff were frustrated because these school problems were already entrenched by the time they came to their attention. The findings outlined in this investigation reinforce these concerns and it seems clear to the writer that earlier intervention during the primary school years might have helped to improve the long-term educational outcomes for many of the young people in the study and, in several instances, could have substantially reduced their need for placement in public care.

Sinclair *et al* (1998) highlight that not dealing with school problems at an early stage increases the probability that young people will become looked after because these problems often add stress to other difficulties at home or in the community. The significance of this is resonant with the findings here since the data indicate that school problems were indeed major contributory factors to some of the young people becoming looked after.

The need to ensure that emphasis is given to prevention and early measures of intervention is highlighted in an official inspection report (Ofsted/SSI, 1995) on the educational experiences of looked after children, where it was found that children in primary schools fared better than secondary school pupils. The report noted that primary school teachers had an overview of the child's needs and had a supportive role in relation to the child. In secondary schools the identification of a key teacher was less clear and, when the child faced a crisis, the personal support was sometimes not sufficiently flexible or immediate to meet the child's needs. The need to address difficulties as soon as possible and to strengthen the positive aspects of children's early education is therefore vital.

One of the important issues this study has also highlighted is that it is critical that significant additional resources to enhance early measures of intervention should be integrated within mainstream schools, rather than provided as 'bolt-on' specialist services. The data obtained suggest that once children are excluded from, or moved out of their mainstream school, there is a danger that a pattern of disruption and discontinuity will follow. While it is particularly important that resources are marshalled speedily when difficulties are highlighted during the primary years of a child's schooling, it is also important that every effort is made to sustain continuity in both primary *and* secondary mainstream educational settings.

The evidence from this study shows that for some young people difficulties only arise at the secondary school stage and these may be a consequence of other problems in their home circumstances or of having difficulty managing the transition process from primary school. It was noted in chapter two (Jackson and Sachdev,

2001; National Advisory Mental Health Council, 1995) that the transition from primary to secondary school is a particularly difficult period for many children and the importance of assessing a child's capacity to cope with this, along with the other adversities they may be experiencing, is emphasised. The question of whether some children are generally more resilient than others is therefore raised by the research since not all of the young people in the sample experienced difficulties.

Of the four cases examined in depth in chapter seven, one, Janet, appears to have maintained a degree of satisfactory progress throughout her school career, even though she experienced a high degree of movement and disruption in her home circumstances, in her care placement arrangements and in her schooling. Moreover, there was some evidence that Janet was able to manage close relationships more effectively than others in the sample since, in her case, she had two foster care placements that had lasted a relatively long period compared with other care placements for the group. Why was this?

Although she experienced frequent moves due to her father's employment, it does not appear that Janet experienced other difficulties in her early childhood and, prior to the age of thirteen, there was no social work involvement with her or her family. This background suggests to the writer that Janet may have benefited from an emotionally stable upbringing and may have acquired resilient characteristics through the presence of other important protective factors in her early childhood. Resilience theory, and the extent to which resilience promoting factors enable children to maintain relative educational progress, may be an extremely useful basis on which to build effective prevention programmes or to assess young people's capacity to cope once they are placed in care.

Certainly, given the late stage at which many young people enter residential care, agencies need to consider how their educational needs can be addressed at a much earlier stage and the development of resilience theory is beginning to highlight some important factors that may be particularly relevant in relation to the school

performance of young people in the care system. This is explored more fully later in this chapter.

Improving Collaborative Practice

As already stated, there was little evidence of close working relationships between staff working in the residential units and school staff. The examples cited earlier of problems in gathering details of the young people's educational progress reflect the poor level of routine communication between the two fields. More than this, there were indications that trust between residential units and schools had not developed to a level that was sufficiently robust for information to be shared. Fletcher-Campbell (1997) also identified the issue of trust as one of the stumbling blocks, noting that defensive rather than collaborative professional attitudes were apparent among staff interviewed in her study.

At whatever stage children become looked after, and for whatever reason, education must be central to the care planning process. While most Scottish authorities have sought, since the early 1980's, to implement joint policies between social work and education to prevent young people coming into the care system (Borland *et al*, 1998), it is clear that these have not always been effective for a substantial number of young people. Furthermore, where young people have already entered the care system, official reports (e.g. Ofsted/SSI, 1995, HMI/SWSI, 2001) have indicated that their educational needs have not received sufficient attention and that ineffective collaboration between social work and education has done little to enhance their achievements. This issue appears to be particularly relevant in the residential care context. Recent research on a sample of 50 looked after children in 5 Scottish local authorities found that although relationships between school staff and foster carers were generally positive some residential units were commented on less favourably (HMI/SWSI, 2001).

An explanation for this may be found in the fact that welfare and education, under previous legislation, were seen as the separate responsibilities of the two departments. As discussed in chapter 3, the implementation in April 1997 of the

Children (Scotland) Act 1995 has reframed the situation and places a corporate responsibility on local authorities. It may be that under the new legislation a more satisfactory joint approach is emerging. Certainly, during the last few years there has been increased political activity in this field and a number of authorities have now merged education departments with social work services for children. At present, the study authority is reviewing the organisational structures within the council and it is proposed that a new department of 'Education and Children's Services' be established (Edinburgh City Council, 2004).

It may be that, forty years after it was first proposed that Social Education Departments be established to oversee the needs of children (Kilbrandon, 1964), we are now seeing the emergence of the type of organisational structures that were envisaged by Kilbrandon. Time will tell whether such changes in the organisation of service delivery will be effective in this particular area. However, as detailed in the literature review, commentators are in broad agreement that the only way that effective corporate parenting and improved communication can be achieved is through greater collaboration between education and social services (Fletcher, 1997; Jackson and Sachdev, 2001). The literature suggests that where local authorities do adopt a more structured corporate approach relating to the educational arrangements for looked after children there is some evidence of higher commitment to children's educational success and children are more likely to be maintained in school (Fletcher-Campbell, 1997; Vernon and Sinclair, 1998).

Corporate Policy and Practice Post-Placement

Based on the evidence emerging from this study, the need to examine corporate policy and procedures relating to the educational arrangements for young people after they have been placed in residential care is pressing. The findings suggest that corporate authorities must find ways of ensuring that children in public care are prioritised in terms of access to education services since data provided by the young people's key-workers confirmed that a substantial majority of the group (66%, n=28) continued to experience problems relating to their education after admission to care and that these problems had persisted throughout their care careers.

It is particularly concerning to note that eight of the twelve young people who had problems in school before admission to care were excluded from their school during the study period. Besides exclusion from school, the data also provided evidence that a high proportion of the young people were regular truants and two-thirds of the young people continued to have behaviour or attendance problems post-placement. Two of the boys were not enrolled in school at all. Overall, the majority of the young people in the sample were not receiving regular education and the data show that school related difficulties were more apparent among the reasons for the young people's placement at the time of the study than had been the case at the initial stage of their placement.

After being placed in care, more than one-third of the group were placed in special provision out with mainstream schools and boys were less likely to be enrolled in mainstream schools than girls. During the study period, half of the young people in the sample were placed under compulsory supervision requirements whereas voluntary measures of care had been more commonplace at the start of their care episodes. The use of compulsory measures had thus become necessary for a higher proportion of the young people after they were first placed in care and difficulties at school also became more apparent.

There is little here to suggest that the corporate parenting responsibilities of the authority were being fulfilled through structured policies and procedures. The rate of school exclusion experienced by the young people in the study was a particularly worrying feature and the data show that almost half of the sample experienced either temporary or permanent exclusion during the study period. Compared with national figures, young people in the study were fifty times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than children in the general school population. Both girls and boys were likely to experience temporary exclusion but the rate of permanent exclusion was much greater among the boys. The inordinately high level of school exclusion found in the study has been established in other studies (e.g. Brodie, 2001, Harker *et al.,* 2003) and is another critical area that the writer believes merits further discussion. This issue is examined in more depth in a later chapter.

As discussed in chapter three, the notion that children in public care have special needs that arise by virtue of being in a care environment, as well as the reasons leading to their placement, is gaining ground and is leading some to call for positive discrimination and discrete support on the part of local authorities as corporate parents (Fletcher-Campbell, 1997). Interestingly, however, while the findings obtained here and in other research indicate that educational progress is not improved as a consequence of being placed in public care and that improved corporate measures are necessary, the views of young people themselves do not always reflect this reality. Harker *et al* (2003) report that 45% of the 80 young people in their study believed that their educational progress had improved since being looked after while 33% described their educational progress as worse and 21% felt there had been no impact at all. For those who felt their education had improved the main factors cited were having a stable home environment which also provided encouragement and support for education. This finding supports the view expressed earlier in this chapter that social workers and carers must raise the priority given to education.

Explanations for Ongoing Educational Difficulties

Jackson and Sachdev, (2001) suggest that research has not always been able to demonstrate conclusively that single factors such as placement instability or low expectations are the key factors leading to the poor educational performance of looked after children. These commentators argue that it is therefore not possible to find agreement among researchers about why the ongoing educational problems appear to be so intractable. Certainly, from the data obtained in this study, the writer believes that educational disadvantage experienced before the care episode is a major contributory factor but it is then difficult to isolate a single particular reason why difficulties (and in some cases, deterioration) in the school experiences of the young people continue after being placed in public care. As with the range of research findings discussed in the literature review, a number of possible explanations have arisen and there appears to be a complex relationship between several factors.

Among these, the level of disruption in the care and school arrangements that typified the experiences of many in the sample does appear to have contributed to their educational difficulties. The summary information provided in Table 13 illustrated the extent of disruption and movement that many of the young people in the sample experienced in both their care careers and their school arrangements. In the 21 cases where previous care histories were known, the young people had a total of 62 placements and in the 19 cases where details were provided, the children had amassed a total of 80 school placements. Almost three-quarters of the sample experienced more than one care placement and the average number of placements in those cases where details were known was three. In one case, a young person had six placements prior to his care placement at the time of the study.

In a study of the experiences of 80 looked after children (Harker *et al.,* 2003) it was found that the most common explanation given by the young people for their poor school performance was the degree of instability associated with the looked after system. An association between disrupted care arrangements and poor educational attainment was also found by Biehal *et al* (1992) and three-quarters of the young people in their study who had four or more placement moves had no qualifications when they left care compared to only half of those who had no moves. A similar association between placement stability and educational performance has been reported in earlier studies (Rowe and Lambert, 1973; Millham *et al,* 1986; Berridge and Cleaver, 1987) as well as more recently (Bailey *et al* 2002), with average or above average performance more likely to occur in cases where there are fewer placement changes.

Thus, while there may be a need to investigate this issue further, the findings obtained here suggest that, at the very least, lack of stability and continuity in their lives is likely to have added to the difficulties the young people faced and is part of the reason why they fared badly at school.

Another factor that seems to have contributed to the poor educational performance of the sample is that education does not appear to have been promoted from the

beginning of their care episodes - despite the history of school difficulties that was apparent in a high proportion of cases. For example, there was no evidence of structured, individual education plans for any of the children in the group and their difficulties appeared to be addressed in a piecemeal fashion. As detailed earlier, it was difficult to obtain copies of the school records for most of the young people and residential units did not routinely hold school reports on case files. All of this suggests that education was not given a high priority by the people responsible for their day-to-day care. Jackson and Sachdev (2001) note that research shows that most social workers do not consider education as part of their core business, a point that has been alluded to elsewhere in this thesis.

Practice was generally fragmented and there was no evidence of corporate policy to prioritise education in the young people's care plans or to maintain continuity in their school arrangements after they became looked after. These findings echo concerns identified elsewhere in the literature about the low priority given to the educational needs of children in public care by social workers and care staff (Borland, 1998; Harker *et al.,* 2003; Jackson, 1994; Knapp, Bryson and Lewis, 1985). In fact, in one of these studies (Harker *et al.,* op cit), social workers were the most likely of all involved in the young people's lives to be described as hindering their educational progress.

Formal assessment of the young people's educational needs was not routinely undertaken and this also appears to have contributed to their ongoing problems. Despite all the evidence of prolonged school related problems, the data show that psychological services were only involved in assessment of a small number of cases. A recent study of 105 young people in residential care (Residential Care Health Project, 2004) also found it surprising that only 12% knew their educational psychologist given that a very high proportion had educational problems. Besides this concern, the findings here show that the degree of input to child care reviews by either teachers or educational psychologists was extremely limited, an issue that has been identified in earlier research (Francis *et al.,* 1996; Kendrick, 1992).

From the data obtained then, the degree of formal and specialist educational assessment undertaken did not seem to be at a level that adequately reflects the needs of the young people. In general, the study findings suggest that more specialist input is required in relation to the assessment of children's educational needs and that teachers and psychological services should be more integral to the care planning process as well as the preparation of appropriate individual education plans.

Such additional input would undoubtedly be met with approval by a number of commentators that have previously advocated the use of 'additionally special' compensatory measures to help looked after children. (Aldgate *et al.,* 1993; Fletcher-Campbell, 1998)

The range of explanations offered by the research points to a complex situation in which the educational difficulties experienced by the young people in the study arose from the interplay of a variety of social, structural, and professional factors. This highlights the need for an integrated response, involving a range of agencies and professionals. Furthermore, the degree of extraordinary educational needs exemplified by the young people appear to require special education measures. While it is not suggested that there is evidence from this study or elsewhere, that young people in local authority care suffer from innate learning impairment, it is the writer's view that the combination of negative personal and extraneous factors observed in this study creates a context in which it may be said that these young people have 'special educational needs'. The next chapter examines whether such a conclusion may justify a broader interpretation of the statutory requirements relating to children with 'special educational needs' and a widening of inclusive education policies to incorporate looked after children.

Key Findings - The Looking After Children Materials

Implementation of new child care legislation in the 1990's (the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Scotland) Act 1995) established higher levels of expectation about the way that the needs of vulnerable children should be assessed than had hitherto existed (Ward and Rose, 2002). These expectations stemmed from concerns about the poor quality of information that formed the basis of decisions about services for children in public care. Chapter two considered how the Looking After Children (LAC) materials were developed initially in England and Wales in response to the new legislative requirements. Chapter eight highlighted how it was anticipated that the core element of the LAC materials, the Assessment and Action Records (AARs), would provide a more structured approach to assessment and that the quality of decision-making would consequently be improved, resulting in better progress for children looked after. One of the central aims of this study was to examine how the section of the AARs that concerns education would affect the educational performance of young people in the study sample.

While one aspect of the investigation relating to this question was abandoned (as previously explained) data obtained from workers who used the materials proved valuable in developing a deeper level of understanding about the positive features and potential drawbacks of using the materials in practice. Several aspects of the findings resulting from the study are considered here. They are:

- Training and Preparation
- Engaging with Young People and their Parents
- Promoting Collaborative Practice
- Improving Assessment and Planning
- Working with Excluded Pupils

Training and Preparation

The study found not only that residential care staff were marginally involved in programmes of training and preparation for using the LAC materials but also that a high proportion received no structured preparation at all. Though the numbers interviewed for this study are small, their experience is similar to that which has been found elsewhere (Wheelaghan *et al.,* 1999) suggesting that residential workers are not regarded as key figures in the implementation process. In addition to the fact that workers were apparently excluded from the preparation process, one of the disturbing features of the study findings was that the staff concerned had very low expectations about receiving training and they seemed unaware of the potential demands the materials would make on their practice skills and knowledge.

It is a matter of some concern that residential workers continue to be regarded as a low priority where the question of training is concerned, particularly when there is widespread recognition that professional qualification rates among staff working in children's homes have remained unacceptably low. Although government targets were set in the early 1990's (Skinner, 1992) to improve the qualification levels of staff in residential child care in Scotland (aiming for 90% of senior staff and 30% of care staff to be professionally qualified in social work and a further 60% to be qualified to Higher National Certificate level) these targets have not been met and, if anything, qualification rates appear to be declining. In this context, there is an even greater need for in-service training to ensure a minimum standard of service. Without basic training on the key features of the LAC materials it is difficult to see how frontline carers can begin to have an effective impact on the educational performance of the young people in their care.

The staff who used the AARs in this study were ill prepared for the task and lacked a basic understanding of the primary purpose of the materials. One of the consequences of this is that when they began to use the materials with the young people they did not devote a great deal of time to the process. Earlier research (Ward, 1995) has indicated that the looking after children materials are neither as time consuming to use nor as costly as critics had anticipated and this finding has been

presented as a positive feature of the method. However, this writer is concerned about presenting the finding in this way because it implies that using the LAC materials need not entail a major commitment of time and resources.

This attitude certainly seems to have been adopted by workers in the study reported here and the data obtained during interviews with them shows that they approached the task in a perfunctory way. Several of the interviewees referred to the fact that information required for the AAR was collected and recorded in a single sitting and it seems that the task was viewed as a form-filling exercise. The negative consequences of undertaking the work in such a bureaucratic manner (particularly with regard to including parents and other professionals in the process) are apparent in many of the findings discussed below and there is clearly a need to ensure that carers are equipped with an understanding of the aims and philosophy of the materials and encouraged to think beyond the mechanics of form-filling to the dynamic process the approach represents. If the AARs are to be constructive and helpful to the young person they must be completed at his or her pace.

Engaging with Young People

One of the perceived strengths of the AARs is that completion of the records facilitates communication between children or young people and their parents and enables carers and social workers to engage with them on issues that are potentially emotionally charged. The findings here concerning whether the LAC materials helped to engage young people in work on their education were largely positive but the carers also expressed some concerns. Certainly, there was almost unanimous agreement among the respondents that the materials are useful for engaging with young people and helping them to talk about their education. One member of staff welcomed the opportunity that the materials created to enable a young person to become more fully involved in the decision-making process. In this instance it was felt that the materials were influential in encouraging the young person to participate in discussions about his education and this had been an important factor in moving to a more satisfactory arrangement. Alongside this experience, several other reasons were given for finding the materials helpful including:

- The young people enjoyed the personal contact and appreciated spending time on the issue
- It helped the young people to realise that issues can be challenged and things done differently
- Using the materials can help to change young people's attitudes
- The materials entail a structure that highlights positive factors as well as the difficulties

With regard to the latter point, the structure of the material was particularly welcomed and staff found the systematic approach helpful because:

- It afforded time to the young people to consider their schooling
- It encouraged staff to become more involved in that area of the young person's world
- It promoted a child centred approach
- It raised the priority of education in the young person's life.

While the views of the care staff were mainly affirmative, one important aspect of the findings is that young people did not react unanimously in a positive way to the materials. There appear to be a number of possible explanations for this. In one case, the young person was decidedly hostile to the process and the care worker felt that this was due to the youngster feeling intimidated by the issues raised in the materials.

Another explanation for more negative reactions may lie in whether the design of the materials takes sufficient account of the range of ability and comprehension levels among looked after children. The AARs are designed to engage young people as full participants in the assessment and planning process and questions in the forms for the 10-14 and post-15 age groups are directed to the young person. However, while the workers indicated that they believed the materials were generally pitched at an appropriate level for the majority of young people in residential care, it was also felt

that a significant proportion of young people needed a lot of support to complete the AARs.

Broader criticisms of the LAC materials, as discussed in the literature review, may provide another potential explanation for the negative reaction on the part of some. This includes the view that the AAR booklets are potentially oppressive and contain powerful subtexts about, for example, 'appropriate' youth lifestyles (Garrett, 1999a). Similarly, some believe there are questions of class and gender-bias that have been largely ignored by those responsible for the design of the LAC materials (Knight and Caveney, 1998). Though the research reported here did not examine the individual views of the young people, it may be that concerns expressed by the critics highlight factors that were at play which may impede the implementation of the approach in certain cases. Further research into this issue would be useful.

Despite the largely favourable account of the way that the material helped in work with young people, the responses obtained from this small sub-set of the study sample suggest that if they were to be reflected in the residential care population as a whole, a significant proportion of young people will not readily engage with the process. The variation in reaction in this small group of young people indicates that careful judgements will need to be made in each individual case about whether the young person is ready to use the materials in a constructive way and also what level of assistance or support will be necessary to enable them to understand the process.

Evaluation of the pilot implementation of the system in Scotland also found that while some young people welcomed the approach, at least as many were uninterested or hostile (Wheelaghan *et al.,* 1999). Factors identified in that study which apparently hampered the involvement of young people were similar to those reported here and included:

- Formal and repetitive nature of many questions
- Young people's limited understanding of the records' purpose or content

- The intrusive nature of some questions
- Inappropriate timing to raise issues
- Workers' lack of confidence or skills

(Wheelaghan *et al.*, 1999)

The comments obtained in interviews with care staff also indicated that there is a need to provide young people with preparation regarding the purpose and function of the materials. However, given the limited training that the residential workers had themselves received, their ability to undertake this task effectively is open to question. Certainly, despite their positive attitude towards the system, there was little real evidence that the Assessment and Action Records were used for in-depth work with the young people about their educational experiences and a question remains about whether the staff were equipped to implement the approach skilfully.

Engaging with Parents

While there was a broadly positive view about the value of the AARs in engaging with young people, staff did not feel that using the materials had encouraged parents to become more fully involved in discussions or plans about the young people's education. Though it is not clear to the researcher what efforts had been made by the care workers to bring parents into the process, the main problem identified by these workers was that relationships between the young people and their parents were frequently very poor and the parents of the young people in the study often failed to take an active interest in their child's progress.

It has been suggested that the LAC materials provide a useful framework for tying parents into the decision making process when their children are in public care (Scottish Executive, 2001a). However, the views of respondents in this investigation suggest that this may not be easy to achieve. Failure to engage with parents in the process of completing the materials is particularly worrying since many of the questions raised can only be answered by social workers or carers working in partnership with birth parents and relatives (Jackson, Fisher and Ward, 1996).

Moreover, current legislation places a clear duty on social workers and carers to work with birth families and to take account of their views in decisions relating to their children's care. This duty promotes the principle of partnership but it appears that much work is needed to overcome some of the mistrust and negative expectations that parents display towards official agencies such as social work (Barclay, 1995; DHSS, 1985).

Promoting Collaborative Practice

While the respondents' comments suggest that parental involvement in the process was negligible because they were reluctant to participate rather than because they were not afforded the opportunity, there is little evidence that staff actively sought to involve other individuals, such as extended family members or schools, in completing the materials. This leads the writer to question the degree of effort that was committed to engaging with parents or others.

Although they apparently did not endeavour to include teachers in the process, there was general recognition among the workers interviewed that using the materials without the active involvement of teachers was a futile exercise. The general consensus among the group was therefore that, wherever possible, schoolteachers *should* contribute to the process.

In fact the majority of the respondents felt that involving school staff in the process of completing the materials was vital and the workers highlighted the need to prepare teachers fully in the implementation of the materials. However, in this research and in previous research it has been noted that training has been largely geared to field social workers and that significant groups, like residential workers, have been absent or poorly represented and that there has also been a general failure to engage professionals beyond social work services (Wheelaghan *et al*, 1999).

While it appears that few others contributed to completing the AARs, staff felt that the materials were useful for clarifying professional roles and responsibilities. This was particularly important in the respondents' view because a major issue for them is

the concern that residential units are being used as a dumping ground for youngsters who are having difficulty fitting into routine educational arrangements.

Care workers welcomed the structure of the materials and though some concern was expressed that the format of the system emphasised a tick box approach, nevertheless it was acknowledged that they:

- Promote a pro-active approach
- Facilitate a sense of agreement about shared responsibilities
- Clarify from the outset who is responsible for aspects of the young person's education plan
- Ensure that action is being taken

Improving Assessment and Planning

Respondents highlighted a degree of discord between the materials' *potential* value as instruments for assessing, planning and reviewing young people's education needs and their *actual* contribution to practice. Two main reasons were given for this. First, as stated elsewhere in this chapter, care workers were concerned about the fact that a proportion of young people in care are likely to be unwilling or unable to engage with the process. Second, leaving aside teachers' personal motivation to do the work, carers expressed uncertainty about teachers' and schools' capacity to be fully involved with, and committed to, the activity.

The doubts expressed about the actual worth of the LAC materials signal crucial issues about the way that the system needs to be well integrated into work across departments and agencies. Successful implementation will not only depend upon workers' ability to connect young people into the process but also on the level of co-operation and sharing of information between different professionals. Yet at the time of the study, and in the evaluation of the Scottish pilot of the materials, there was no evidence of links being established between the LAC system and other major planning or reviewing systems for children (Wheelaghan *et al.,* 1999).

Recent development work in England and Wales has led to the production of the conceptual framework known as the 'Integrated Children's System' (ICS), a single approach to undertaking the key processes of assessment, planning, intervention and review based on the Looking After Children materials and the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need. This work represents a co-ordinated approach to help social services managers and colleagues from other agencies to improve outcomes for children (DfEE, 2004).

Drawing from the experience of auditing the implementation of the LAC materials it has been recognised that implementation of the ICS will require the involvement of all agencies working together and should not be viewed solely as a social services responsibility. Those responsible for implementation have called for the establishment of Local Implementation Groups to establish the system as an inter-agency initiative (ibid). It seems sensible to adopt such a measure at the outset since the success of the approach will rely on close inter-agency collaboration. However, it is not clear to the writer that such measures have been widely adopted for the LAC materials and there is little evidence that where they do exist they have led to significant improvements in areas such as the educational performance of children in public care. Given the limited findings obtained in this study it appears there is a need for more detailed research into the degree of inter-agency co-operation in the operational arrangements of the LAC materials.

Working with Excluded Pupils

Staff were not convinced that the Assessment and Action Record is a useful or relevant tool for working with young people who are excluded from, or truanting from, school. Concern was also expressed regarding whether the young people themselves would see any relevance or purpose to the material if they are not in school. This is a particularly worrying concern given the degree of school exclusion experienced by young people in the study. If the findings here are typical for young people in residential care more generally then it would appear that the AAR may be of little value to those young people who are excluded and disaffected.

Similar apprehension was expressed about not being able to use the materials constructively in those cases where young people are not enrolled in a school. This was because of problems in identifying an appropriate link person. Ward (1995) found that questions in the education section of the AAR were often disregarded if the young person was not attending school and when a looked after child was excluded from school it appeared that no-one took on responsibility for compensatory action. For some, the key concern in those cases where young people are excluded from school is about accessing senior education officials regarding the allocation of a school placement. It was unclear to staff how the materials help in this respect.

Given the inordinately high levels of school exclusion found in this study and in the official statistics, it seems that the LAC system may run into significant difficulties as a means of improving the educational performance of a high proportion of children in public care. The need to address the underlying factors that contribute to the disproportionate level of school exclusion for looked after children is pressing. This matter is discussed more extensively in chapter eleven.

In summary then, the study suggests that there is scope for improvement in the use of the LAC materials. In particular, greater attention is required concerning the training needs of carers and other front-line professionals. Similarly there is a need to broaden strategic planning and policy to ensure that the full range of steakholders is involved in and contributes to the implementation process. Expectations about the usefulness of the materials are mixed and there remain doubts about their potential for engaging with parents, disaffected youngsters and those excluded from school. On the other hand, there is some evidence that carers had found the materials to be a valuable tool for raising issues with young people and involving them more fully in aspects of their school arrangements. Moreover, care workers welcomed the structure of the approach and felt the potential for extending and clarifying roles and responsibilities between professionals was one of their main strengths.

Coping With Transitions and the Role of Resilience Theory

Recent research has shown that one of the factors most likely to disadvantage young people in care is poorly managed transitions (DOH, 2000). As shown in the previous chapters, the young people in this study presented with a range of personal, social and educational problems and the majority were confronted not just with single issues but with multiple complex difficulties. Moreover, that they experienced problems within their educational circumstances is not surprising given the number of transitional episodes in both their care and school arrangements. Chapter ten examines one important consequence of this - the disproportionate level of school exclusion experienced by the young people and the disruption this inflicted on their schooling. Here, however, I anticipate some of the factors that may give rise to that particular problem by considering the findings in the study about the potentially harmful impact of disruption and excessive transitional experiences on the development of resilience attributes in the sample.

The data presented earlier show that most of the young people in the study experienced multiple transitions in their lives. Only a small number made the transition from primary school to secondary school smoothly and the boys in the group, in particular, appeared to be less likely to manage the early stages of secondary school successfully.

As was indicated in the literature review, transitional episodes or events, such as changing schools, being bullied or entering and leaving the care system, represent particular periods of heightened risk in children. Learning to be aware of how these transitions affect the experiences of children is important, especially for those youngsters who, for whatever reason, are unable to remain at home with their families. Being sensitive to the way that the transfer from primary school to secondary school affects looked after children is, however, to understand only one aspect of the transition experiences of this group. All young people have to undergo a variety of complex transitions during the adolescent stage of their development. These entail changes in many areas of their lives including, biological changes;

changes in cognitive development; changes in social and peer relationships; and changes in family relationships. The data obtained here show that, in addition to the usual range of adolescent transitions, many of the young people in this study had to cope with additional multiple transitional episodes in relation to both their care placements and their school arrangements. These included transitions:

- at the point of first entering school
- at the point of transfer between primary school and secondary school
- between schools - in those cases where school placements broke down
- at the point of first entering care
- from care placement back to home
- between care placements (where children had disrupted care arrangements)

Not surprisingly, the evidence of fractured or disrupted home and school arrangements that typify the experiences of the majority of the young people in the sample suggests that these multiple transitions have not been beneficial to their educational attainment.

An important question arising from this finding is how to develop effective strategies and support methods to reduce the degree of unnecessary transitions for looked after children or how to help them to deal more positively with these episodes when they occur. As highlighted in chapter five, the young people in this study entered the care system for a variety of reasons and, in general, came from disadvantaged, disrupted and, sometimes, abusive circumstances. Such experiences and circumstances (especially when they are multiple and prolonged) may adversely affect some or many areas of a child's development and thus lead to problems in those particular areas - or in other aspects of their life more generally. Investigations have shown that in almost every area of development delay, poverty and inequality are relevant and, often, paramount factors (Acheson, 1998). Along with improvements in their general development, therefore, better educational outcomes were unlikely to result for the study sample without the full range of risk factors in their circumstances being addressed.

From the evidence obtained, however, it appears that the problems that brought them into care were not adequately resolved. In fact, if typical of the care experiences of looked after children more generally, the evidence suggests that a high proportion of looked after children may continue to have problems, or acquire additional education problems, as a consequence of being away from home. Not only are the risks to looked after young people's educational progress high, there is also little evidence from the research conducted here, or elsewhere in this field, that the development of positive educational experiences is being promoted as a protective factor in relation to other problem areas in their lives.

Teasing out the effects of specific experiences is often difficult or impossible but one of the most common legacies resulting from the kinds of disadvantage that the young people in this study experienced is a poor self-image. Having low self-esteem can result in young people failing to achieve their potential in almost any of life's areas, including education. However, not all children who experience adverse circumstances react in the same way. Indeed, children's vulnerability to such circumstances varies greatly so that, even though the majority of looked after children have very poor education experiences, this is not true for all of them. In chapter seven the experience of one young girl in this study (Janet) was described in some detail and this showed that, despite considerable instability and disruption in her life, she had maintained a consistent level of educational progress both before and after her care episodes.

In the general population surprisingly large numbers of young people mature into coping, successful adults despite stressful, disadvantaged, or even abusive childhoods. Yet other young people are so emotionally vulnerable that seemingly minor losses and rebuffs can be devastating, sometimes even precipitating severe mental disorder (National Advisory Mental Health Council, 1995). Developing our understanding of why some youngsters cope better in adverse circumstances is therefore an important part of the process of improving practice with looked after children. What is it that makes some children and young people more 'resilient' to these potentially damaging experiences? What part does schooling play in helping

children to become more resilient? Finding some of the answers to these questions will prove to be a useful form of enquiry for finding ways to improve the educational performance, and thereby the long-term opportunities in life, of all looked after children.

As outlined in the literature review in chapter two, protective factors have been identified that appear to be associated with long-term social and emotional well-being in adulthood. These protective factors have been located at three different levels within an ecological framework, namely, 'The Individual'; 'Family Relationships' and 'The Wider Community' (Daniel and Wassell, 2002). It is believed that the answer to identifying protective or 'resilience' factors may lie within the complex interaction of these levels. Specifically, it is considered important to understand:

- The qualities of risk and adversity involved
- The qualities and experiences of the young person, and
- The qualities of the relationships and environment in which the young person is growing up

(Gilligan, 2001, p5)

Given the evidence of young people in this investigation experiencing difficulties in all of these domains, the model appears to have particular relevance for analysis and discussion of their issues. The findings reported in the study suggest that the need to understand the interplay between the young person and his or her environment, including the nature of his or her relationships with their family, is crucial to assessment and intervention practice with young people who are cared for away from home.

Newman and Blackburn (2002, p.2) suggest that children and young people who are best equipped to overcome the adversities that occur during periods of transition will have:

- Strong support networks
- The presence of at least one unconditionally supportive parent or parent substitute
- A committed mentor or other person from outside the family
- Positive school experiences
- A sense of mastery and a belief that one's own efforts can make a difference
- A range of extra curricular activities that promote the learning of competencies and emotional maturity
- The capacity to re-frame adversities so that the beneficial as well as the damaging effects are recognised
- The ability – or opportunity – to "make a difference" by, for example, helping others through volunteering, or undertaking part-time work
- Exposure to challenging situations which provide opportunities to develop both problem-solving abilities and emotional coping skills

The findings detailed in the study show that many of these resilience-promoting factors were absent from the young people's lives. For example, besides the obvious difficulties that many of the young people encountered in their schooling, there was little evidence of them having strong support networks or the involvement of a committed mentor in their lives. On the basis of this evidence, the challenge confronting those who work with young people in residential care is therefore to be able to assess the presence or absence of risk and protective factors and to intervene in a way that promotes protective factors and helps them to become more resilient.

This study did not seek to investigate all of the potential risk factors affecting the young people in the sample and it may be that more detailed focus on some of these would have highlighted additional risks. For example, no data were obtained concerning the genetic factors that might have resulted in particular predispositions in the young people. Nevertheles, examination of the available data in relation to some of the other levels addressed by the model does show that a very high proportion of the young people in this study were affected by several of the risk

factors at each level. The conclusion to be drawn from the analysis is that, in the main, the young people did not have sufficient protective factors to enable them to develop resilience qualities. Their capacity to cope with pressures or adverse circumstances in an educational context is therefore in doubt and may help to explain their poor educational performance.

The main issues relating to each of the three domains – individual; family and; environment - are considered below.

The Child

At the individual level, there is evidence that many of the young people in the study were affected by a number of high risk factors. Those that have been identified are:

- Development Issues
- Difficult temperament
- Poor Educational Performance

Development Issues

While the general physical well-being of the young people was said to be satisfactory, there were indications, in several cases, of problems relating to their emotional or psychological 'development'. It is notable, for instance, that almost fifteen per cent of the group were said to have psychological problems and that they had previously been seen by specialist psychological or psychiatric services. This figure may be an underestimate of the actual number experiencing problems since, as with other studies (Brodie, 2001) data did not always accurately reflect the true extent of problems. Other studies of young people in the care system have found a similar percentage of children exhibiting behavioural problems associated with their health or development (Packman and Hall, 1998). Likewise, Whitaker *et al* (1998), reporting on the emotional state of children in their research, noted that many of the young people exhibited a range of emotional and behavioural problems and were

prone, among other things, to harming others, destroying property, exclusion from school and disruptive behaviour at school. Difficulties in the relationships between the young people and other family members, as indicated below, were also indicative of problems in their emotional development.

Difficult Temperament

Linked to the above, many of the young people in the sample could also be described as having 'difficult temperament' issues. For example, almost half of the young people were said to be 'outwith parental control' at the point of first referral to the social work department. This was the most common factor cited in all of the initial referrals with more than half of the boys (five out of nine) falling into this category and also almost half of the girls (eight out of nineteen).

The degree of difficulty and tension in relationships between the young people and their parents is particularly notable and given that the majority of the young people were secondary school aged when first referred to the social work department, this suggests that the difficulties associated with the 'normal' adolescent transitions referred to earlier may have become unmanageable for the young people and their families at this stage.

Concerns about the temperament of the young people can also be inferred from the degree of disruption in evidence in their schooling and care arrangements.

Poor educational performance

Another factor that points to a high degree of risk at the individual level of the model is the educational experience of the young people. 'Poor educational performance' was clearly a significant issue for the majority of the sample. Two-thirds of the young people were reported to have behaviour or attendance problems and almost 40% were not receiving regular education, either because of failure to attend school, or exclusion or because they were not enrolled in a school. As will be seen later in this chapter, problems associated with educational progress in childhood are linked to a young person's ability to manage the transition to adulthood successfully and

there are major negative consequences for those who do not benefit from the protective factors of good education experiences.

The Family

Risk factors affecting the young people were also apparent at the family level of the model. Among the sample there was evidence of high levels of:

- Abuse
- Parental separation
- Parental conflict
- Parent-child hostility

Abuse

With regard to the issue of abuse, the data show that this was a risk factor that affected a high proportion of the young people. Information about the reasons they were first referred to social work indicates that 'physical abuse' was given as a factor in five cases, 'sexual abuse' was indicated in three instances and 'emotional abuse' was cited in two cases. In total therefore, where it was known, almost one third of the young people in the sample had experienced abusive circumstances before being placed away from their families. In addition to the experience of abuse, the data show that 'lack of parental care' was cited as a concern in five instances, suggesting that the circumstances of several of the young people, if not abusive, were at the least neglectful. Research has shown that there is a significant relationship between poor educational performance and experience of abuse (Farmer and Pollock, 1998). Children who have been sexually abused may experience adverse effects on their educational performance (Kendall-Tackett *et al.,* 1993) and children who have experienced physical abuse are likely to suffer adverse effects on their cognitive development and show behaviour problems at home, in school, and with their peers (Gibbons *et al.,* 1995).

Parental Conflict and Separation

The risks associated with parental conflict and separations were also abundantly evident. In eleven cases 'family breakdown' (that is, families splitting up) was cited as the reason that the children in this sample were referred to the social work department, making this the second most common factor given for referral. Nine girls were included in this category but only two boys. Fewer than a quarter of the young people in the study came from family households where both birth parents were living at home. One third of the young people came from families that were reconfigured, that is, various types of family composition where parents had re-married or formed new households with other partners and their children. One quarter of the young people came from lone parent families, though notably none of these were lone fathers. In five cases, of which four were girls, the young people lived in households that included step-fathers.

Parent-Child Hostility

Family relationship problems, particularly difficult relationships between parents and their children, were recorded in a high number of cases. More than half of the young people in the study, eleven girls and four boys, were first referred for social work intervention by their parents or relatives because of relationship and behaviour difficulties. Mothers initially referred nine of the young people while in two other instances it was the father of the young person who made the referral. In another case, both parents referred the young person concerned. Other members of the young person's family made the first referral for three of the young people.

Difficulties in parent-child relationships appeared resistant to change. Not only was this the cause of initial referral to the social work department for a high proportion of the sample but also, in many instances, it was the reason for young people being placed in, or remaining in, care. The data concerning their placements at the time of the study show that, while 'family breakdown' was noted as the most common reason for most of the young people, the second most likely reason for placement was 'outwith parental control'.

The Environment

Besides the presence of risk factors at the individual and family levels, there is also evidence that the young people were affected by a number of risk factors within the environmental level. In particular, the data show that the young people were affected by:

- Poverty and low social capital
- Unpredictable and unmanageable crises

Poverty And Low Social Capital

Surprisingly, details of the families' financial circumstances were not routinely held on the care records. However, from the data obtained, 'poverty and low social capital' was apparent in a high number of the cases in the sample, with less than one third of the families in the study able to rely on a wage earner for their main source of income. Of the eight families where there were wage earners, six had two incomes and it was notable that these households were living in owner-occupied housing whereas two-thirds of the families, overall, were living either in local authority, housing association, or private rented accommodation. A high percentage of the families were dependent on state benefits as their main source of income and, of these, a substantial proportion were reconfigured or lone parent families.

Unpredictable and unmanageable crises

Problems related to 'unpredictable and unmanageable crises' were also in evidence. Of the twenty young people who had more than one care episode, nine 'first placements' were emergency admissions. Eight of these were girls. Fourteen of the twenty-eight young people in the sample (ten girls and four boys) were placed in their current placements under compulsory supervision orders. Two-thirds of the young people (eleven girls and seven boys) were placed in their current placement as a consequence of emergency arrangements.

Besides these data concerning their care arrangements, the information obtained also shows that difficulties in school arrangements were often unpredictable and unmanageable. The data indicate that educational difficulties were ongoing issues throughout the school careers of a very high proportion of the group. Even with limited availability of data, there were early indications of behaviour or attendance problems in half of the cases in the study and many of the young people subsequently experienced multiple school placements and a number were later excluded from school or taken out of mainstream provision. More than one third of the young people in the group were also referred for social work intervention.

In terms of assessing the risks within the table of resilience risk factors then, the data concerning the young people provide a great deal of evidence which indicates that this group of youngsters can be described as 'high risk'. In the main, their lives were characterised by prolonged and multiple stressors in their personal, family and environmental circumstances, stressors that will undoubtedly have been aggravated by the inordinate degree of transitions that the young people also had to endure following the onset of their care experience.

Aside from the broader socio-economic factors, over which social workers and carers (not to mention families) have little direct influence, consideration of these findings suggests that particular elements of the risk factors afflicting the young people can be assigned to two main fields of analysis within resilience theory. These were outlined in some detail in chapter two. The first of these relates to the concept of a 'secure base', founded on stable care and continuous relationships. The second concerns 'education' as a resilience-promoting factor.

The general outcomes for many young people in the care system are frequently not positive and all the available evidence shows, in particular, that their educational outcomes are especially poor when compared to the general population. As with all the other research in this field, the findings discussed in this study portray a picture of underachievement in the educational experiences of the young people -

experiences which are characterised by early disruption, frequent moves, low levels of attainment and high levels of truancy and exclusion.

As highlighted in chapter six, in those cases where detailed information was available, there was evidence of considerable movement and disruption in the young people's education from a relatively early age. Seven of the young people in the study had amassed, between them, a total of thirty-four school placements. The most stable period of schooling for this group tended to be during their primary school years, though even here placements lasted, at best, no more than four years. The data indicate that there was a failure to maintain stability and continuity in the young people's early school arrangements and this had resulted in a subsequent pattern of breakdown, school transfer and educational disruption.

Many of the young people also experienced periods of temporary exclusion and a significant proportion were permanently excluded. Inevitably, these episodes added to the disruption and instability in their lives. In total, almost half of the group experienced either temporary or permanent exclusion from school during the study period and young people in the study group were fifty times more likely to be permanently excluded than pupils in the general school population.

In addition to these disruptive experiences in their school circumstances, almost three-quarters of the young people in the study had experienced more than one care placement. Taking their current placements into account, one of the young people in the group had been looked after away from home in seven different placements. Another had five placements while two others had four care episodes and four had been looked after in three placements.

The inordinate degree of instability and insecurity that is associated with these changing circumstances, moving between home and care placement or between one care placement and another, together with associated changes in school, undoubtedly had a major detrimental impact on their educational performance. This is true not only because of the negative effect on the levels of continuity in significant

relationships in their lives but also because, as previously indicated, coping with transitions represents particular periods of heightened risk in children. It is important to recognise that while adults may not always regard such changes as potentially damaging, studies that have used children as informants of their experiences of coping and stress have shown that children tend to emphasise the stressful nature of transitional events such as changing schools (Compas, 1987; Wertlieb, 1991, cited in Newman and Blackburn, 2002).

The importance of this negative impact on the educational outcomes of looked after children cannot, therefore, be over-emphasised, not least because of the potential long-term damage that may result in many other areas of their adult lives. Recent analysis of National Child Development Study data (Hobcraft, 1998) has shown that educational performance is the most frequent and effective childhood predictor of adult outcomes. Research suggests that individuals who leave school with low levels of educational attainment are at a higher risk of experiencing social exclusion as adults.

Examination of the findings reported in this study using a risk and resilience perspective show that the young people concerned were burdened by an overwhelming preponderance of risk factors. Given that children are unlikely to be able to resist the cumulative effects of such risk factors without the benefit of adequate protective factors (Garmezy and Masten, 1994) it is little wonder that being subjected to such a relentless stream of multiple adversities has resulted in negative consequences for these young people. As with most looked after children, Jackson and Martin (1998) argue that unless there are strong countervailing protective factors or processes, such as positive educational experiences, the odds against them are simply too high.

Summary

The ecological model of resilience examined here suggests that where there is an absence of protective factors in children's family, community and educational

circumstances and where poverty, deprivation and other stressors are constant and relentless, children are unlikely to acquire resilience attributes. Many of these adversities featured strongly in the home circumstances of the young people in this study and there is evidence that they struggled to cope in several aspects of their lives but perhaps particularly with their education. Furthermore, one of the striking findings of the study is that the young people were faced with excessive transitions in relation to both their care arrangements and their schooling and that these transitions were harmful to their progress.

However, transitions provide opportunities as well as threats and, though there is a strong belief that lack of positive early childhood experiences result in children failing to develop resilience, there is evidence that these early experiences do not necessarily lead to permanent failure. Children's progress can be affected at different stages of development and compensatory interventions in later life can trigger resilient responses (Newman and Blackburn, 2002)

Studies have shown that resilience-promoting factors remain quite constant and that supportive families, positive educational experiences, strong external networks, positive peer relationships and the involvement of an interested adult are of particular importance.

Though there is increasing knowledge of the way that risk and protective factors affect the individual experiences of children, we know less about how to influence those factors in order to increase resilience (Rutter, 1993). It is vital, therefore, that carers and professionals apply knowledge of resilience theory in their work with young people so that they increase the way that they learn to cope with adversities and difficult transitions.

It is understandable that much of the focus of work with children in residential care has been on the identification and elimination of the risk factors that impede their satisfactory development. However, while gains may be made from adopting this approach, there is a strong argument for adopting a strategy that increases the

attention given to resilience enhancing factors. Giving young people the opportunity to acquire valued social roles through supporting their educational attainment, encouraging their interests and leisure activities, helping them to engage in part-time work or voluntary activities and contributing to general household activities, leads to the development of self-esteem and self-efficacy. These, in turn, lead to a level of empowerment in young people's lives which can allow them to cope with adverse circumstances and improve their long-term outcomes.

CHAPTER TEN

EXCLUSION FROM SCHOOL: A 'SPECIAL NEEDS' ISSUE?

"Opening the doors of learning is the single most important means of ending injustice and exclusion. I am determined to open those doors for every single child in Scotland." (McConnell, Scottish Executive, 2001b)

Introduction

One of the key findings in this study, as with others that have recently explored the experiences of looked after children (e.g. HMI/SSI, 2001, Dixon and Stein, 2002), is that children who are looked after away from home have an increased likelihood of encountering episodes of exclusion from school compared with children in the general school population. The data reported here show that the young people in the sample were ten times more likely to experience temporary exclusion and *fifty times more likely to experience permanent exclusion*, than children in the general school population.

As discussed in the literature review, the excessively high level of exclusion apparent among this group has been established in other investigations and official reports. These findings signal that exclusion from school is a major issue affecting young people in public care that requires attention in both policy and practice.

Despite the accumulating research evidence that looked after children are at greater risk of being excluded from school than their peers, there is as yet little understanding of how the interplay between care and education affects this issue and to date there has been only one study (Brodie, 2001) that has focused specifically on

this subject. In the writer's opinion, the findings discussed in this study may add to what is currently a comparatively limited body of knowledge.

This chapter begins by considering the way that exclusion/truanting from school inevitably results in poor educational attainment and then examines the definition of what is meant by the term 'exclusion from school', outlining the grounds that must be satisfied before exclusion can be used.

The next sections examine first, the main reasons recorded for exclusions - highlighting the fact that behavioural problems predominate - and then, how these problems relate to the circumstances and experiences of looked after children and the young people in this study. Next, the recent trends in the use of school exclusion in Scotland are considered, again relating these to children in public care. Two main issues arising from the findings reported in this study are then discussed in some detail. These are 'gender and school exclusion', and 'socio-economic factors leading to exclusion'.

The chapter concludes by examining whether the time has come to locate the educational needs and arrangements of looked children within the context of special educational needs policy. Though this has traditionally been the domain of children and young people with intrinsic educational difficulties it is argued that children cared for away from home should be included within this framework by virtue of their contextual circumstances.

School Exclusion and Educational Attainment

The evidence gathered in this research suggests that one of the key reasons for the poor educational performance of young people looked after away from home is that they are frequently absent from school. While this may be partly due to high levels of truancy, the data obtained here also show that their absence can be explained by the extremely high rate of official exclusion among this group. Research (and common

sense) suggests that school attendance is critical in relation to educational attainment. Studies have found an association between exclusion and poor levels of basic literacy skills (Ofsted, 1995, 1996) and investigations have shown that a high proportion of school truants gain few or no qualifications compared to non-truanting children. It has also been found that care leavers who have had *successful* educational outcomes are significantly more likely *not* to have experienced absence from school through exclusion or truancy (Jackson and Martin, 1998).

Measures to improve the educational progress of looked after children, and thereby promote their *social inclusion*, must therefore address this unacceptably high level of *school exclusion*. The use of exclusion from school as a response to disruptive behaviour raises the important issue of pupils' right to education as there can be no doubt that the impact of repeated or extended periods of exclusion from school, possibly with little alternative educational provision, is very damaging to any pupil's education and long-term life prospects (HMI, 2001).

What is Exclusion from School?

Exclusion from school is the ultimate sanction that a school can employ against a child whose behaviour is deemed unacceptably disruptive or violent or who is persistently disobedient. Schooling is denied the excluded pupil for a designated period of time and re-admittance may be granted if the pupil and/or the parent(s) undertake to change their behaviour (Munn *et al.,* 1997). Exclusion may be temporary or, in the most serious cases, permanent. Exclusion is temporary when a pupil is excluded from a school but remains on the register of that school because they are expected to return when the exclusion period is completed. The term 'removed from the register' refers to a pupil who is permanently excluded and their name removed from the school register. Such a pupil would then be educated at another school or via some other form of provision such as home tuition. The process of being removed and subsequently receiving education elsewhere can either take place with or without a break in school attendance (Scottish Executive, 2003).

When can a child be excluded?

In Scotland two main grounds for exclusion are specified in the Schools General (Scotland) Regulations 1975 as amended. These grounds are:

- That the education authority are of the opinion that the parent of the pupil refuses or fails to comply or to allow the pupil to comply with the rules, regulations or disciplinary requirements of the school

- That they consider that in all the circumstances to allow the pupil to continue his/her attendance at the school would be likely to be seriously detrimental to order and discipline in the school or to the educational well-being of pupils there

While the legal responsibility for exclusion rests with the local education authority, it is open to the authority to devolve the power to exclude to senior management level within a school. However, it has been suggested that such a policy leaves considerable scope for abuse and variation in practice (Hayden, 1994). Previous research on the use of school exclusions in Scotland (Munn *et al.,* 1997) found there was:

- Considerable diversity with regard to policy on school exclusion across Scotland
- A general lack of systematic collection and analysis of statistics on exclusion
- Very limited availability of information about the range, quality and cost of off-site provision for pupils excluded from school
- A lack of well planned staff development for those working with pupils who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Munn's investigation concluded that the degree of diversity in practice across Scotland resulted in unequal treatment of pupils in different parts of the country and the consensus that emerged from her study resulted in new guidance on exclusion from school being issued (Circular 2/98, 1998). Revised draft guidance has since been issued (Circular x/02, 2002) which clarifies the policy context within which exclusion should be considered. This states that:

- Exclusion from school is seen as a last resort
- The educational needs of excluded pupils must continue to be addressed
- Multi-disciplinary and inter-agency approaches are necessary to address many of the concerns which give rise to the consideration of exclusion for individual pupils
- The promotion and maintenance of positive school ethos ... is of significant importance in reducing the need for exclusion from school

Besides asserting the policy framework, guidance also currently requires schools to follow specific procedures when a pupil is excluded and it covers a range of key issues including:

- An emphasis on the inclusive nature of Scottish education
- Clarification of the purposes of exclusion and of relevant aspects of legislation
- Principles of good practice at both education authority and school levels
- Encouragement to schools to evaluate their use of exclusions, to promote a positive school ethos and, more generally, to develop positive approaches to behaviour management
- Encouragement to authorities to record and monitor exclusions using a national set of criteria and procedures.

The Standard in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000, section 40, amended section 14 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, by placing a duty on education authorities to provide alternative education for pupils who are excluded from school. The 2000

Act, section 2(2), also places an obligation on education authorities and schools to have due regard to the views of children and young people on decisions which significantly affect them.

Behaviour Problems and School Exclusion

As already indicated in the literature review, there is a strong association between children with behaviour difficulties and those who are excluded from school (Hayden and Dunne, 2001; Harris, 2000; Ofsted, 1996; SEU, 1998). In particular, the evidence considered suggests that exclusions are often the result of an accumulation of a variety of behaviour problems within the classroom.

Such a pattern of escalating difficulties may help to explain the high rate of exclusion among young people in this study who were often affected by a range of problems in their personal, family and social relationships. Frequently, there is more than one reason for a young person's exclusion but, significantly, Attwood *et al* (2003) have drawn attention to the fact that in the majority of cases 'poor relationships' permeate children's problems at school prior to exclusion. Furthermore, Hayden and Dunne (2001) found that parents believed that part of the reason that some of their children were excluded was because acute difficulties at home were spilling over into the child's behaviour at school.

Despite these views, most explanations for children's exclusion tend to focus solely on their behaviour rather than their wider social context, leading Galloway and Goodwin (1987) to argue that educationalists have labelled children as 'maladjusted' or, more recently, as having 'emotional and behavioural difficulties' (EBD), thus legitimising their segregation from mainstream schools rather than addressing the adverse circumstances in other areas of their lives that may be affecting their behaviour.

Concerns about the wider issues affecting children's behaviour appear pertinent to the young people in this investigation (and perhaps therefore to children in

residential care more generally), as there was certainly evidence that they had difficulties with relationships before referral to social work. As indicated earlier, more than half were first referred for social work intervention by their parents or relatives because of family relationship problems (particularly, difficult relationships between parents and the young people) and the second most likely reason for any of the young people being referred to the social work department was that they were 'outwith parental control'.

The risk of difficulties in their home circumstances 'leaking' into their behaviour in school is therefore likely to be heightened for those young people that are removed from their families to be looked after by the local authority. That is not to say, however, that schools do not ever respond sensitively to the needs of children before resorting to exclusion. In fact, some schools record that exclusion represents the 'last straw' in a series of misdemeanours (Brodie, 2001). However, recognising that young people in public care require exceptional responses on the part of schools is, nonetheless, a matter that must be addressed in local policy and practice.

Government guidance (DfEE, 1999a and 1999b; Scottish Executive, Circular 2/98) has certainly stressed that exclusions (especially permanent exclusions) should be used sparingly and as a last resort, after alternative approaches have been tried, including identifying a child's special educational needs. Guidance states that exclusion should only be used in response to 'serious breaches' of school policy. It is not an appropriate response to 'minor offences' or emotional and behavioural difficulties. Schools should consider various factors including the age of the pupil; his or her previous record; particular relevant circumstances; frequency and severity of behaviour precipitating exclusion; and whether other agencies should or had been involved (e.g. educational psychological services (EPS) and educational welfare services (EWS)). If an excluded child is looked after, the local authority social services must be informed.

Looked After Children

As already reported above, the experiences of the majority of the young people in this study reflect earlier research findings which show that children who are looked after and accommodated in residential care by local authorities are frequently the most vulnerable to exclusion of all children in schools and they are significantly over-represented in exclusion figures (SSI/Ofsted, 1995; Brodie, 2001).

Many of the problems and issues relating to the young people's experience of exclusion arise in their school and home circumstances prior to becoming looked after and these do not appear to be improved as a consequence of being in the care of the local authority. Other studies (e.g. Francis *et al.,* 1996; Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998) have found that educational difficulties are frequently a key factor in the decision to place a young person in public care.

Decision-making regarding children in need of care and protection in Scotland lies within a system of lay panels known as children's hearings and a high proportion of children entering the care system are placed by children's hearings. Trained volunteers (three at each hearing) in discussion with the child and family come to a decision regarding the child. Recent work has shown that cases involving non-attendance at school are the most common type of referral to children's hearings (Hallet *et al,* 1998). Yet the system is not considered to work well with the majority of these, as there are often disputes between social work and education departments about ownership of the problem (ibid). Such disputes result in poor outcomes for the young people concerned.

The respective departmental and 'corporate' legal obligations concerning the promotion of welfare and the provision of education to looked after children (outlined in chapter three) are, therefore, not fulfilled in every case. The findings here, for example, show not only that a high proportion of the young people had experienced exclusion in earlier schooling but also that they continued to do so after becoming looked after. In two cases, young people who had not previously been

temporarily excluded were permanently excluded from school after they became looked after.

It seems apparent in this investigation that many of the young people's pre-existing school related problems are connected to broader emotional, psychological and learning needs and that these often result in relationship and behaviour difficulties that require support and attention during the in-care episode. It is little wonder then, since the majority of reasons given for school exclusions are because of behaviour problems, that young people in the residential care system should be particularly vulnerable.

Previous guidance on the education of looked after children in England and Wales (DfES, 1994) recognised the vulnerability of such children and a subsequent report on children looked after by local authorities (SSI/Ofsted, 1995) further highlighted the marginalisation of these young people. The latter report found that in four local authorities, 9.6 per cent of children looked after by the local authority had statements for Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties and some 30 per cent had some special educational needs, they often truanted and tended to be over-represented in exclusion figures. Services provided for them by government agencies tended to lack co-ordination between social services departments (SSDs) and LEAs (Cited in Daniels *et al.,* 2003).

Revisions to current guidance in England and Wales (DfEE, 1999b) recognise the need to address the circumstances of children in public care. Schools are expected to be especially sensitive to exclusion issues where looked after children are concerned and social services should be involved in all cases at the earliest opportunity to work with the school to avoid the need to exclude the pupil.

Similarly, draft revised guidance in Scotland (Circular x/02) recognises the importance of a multi-disciplinary approach and inter- agency co-operation in relation to looked after children and, in these cases, the relevant social worker and carer of the excluded child, as well as the parent(s), should be advised of the decision

to exclude. The guidance also recognises that a social worker or carer may have an advocacy role in relation to a looked after child to ensure that he or she receives the necessary support and advice.

Trends in school exclusions

Following the abolition of corporal punishment in education authority schools in the 1970s, there was considerable debate about how best to maintain discipline in schools. In many cases, the approaches subsequently adopted led to concerns about the increasing use of exclusion from school as a sanction for disruptive behaviour. In particular, concern grew about the significant number of excluded pupils whose education was seriously disrupted. Some did not receive appropriate alternative full-time education over long periods of time. Others only received limited basic tuition and a few received no education at all (HMI, 2001). A National Audit Commission Report (1999) found that on average it took 11 weeks for excluded children to be provided with alternative education and even then, almost 70% received less than 10 hours of teaching support per week. In one study (Hayden, 1997) a significant number of excluded primary school children were out of school for more than six months before they were given alternative provision.

Despite these mounting concerns, it was not until 1998 that the Scottish Executive introduced a national system for recording exclusions and so the ability to collect and compare data prior to then was severely restricted. Since the introduction of the new system, however, data is more detailed and reliable at both local and national levels.

Official figures for school exclusion rates in Scotland, during the school years1998/99-2001/02 (Scottish Executive, 2003d), show that 85 per cent of all exclusions are from secondary schools with the peak ages occurring in years S2, S3 and S4 (that is, 13-15 years).

During the period that aggregate data has been collected there was initially a substantial increase in the number of children excluded from school, from 34,831 in

1998/99 to 38,769 in 1999/2000. Increases occurred during this period in the use of both temporary and permanent (removed from the register) exclusions (See Table 16)

Table 16

Total number of exclusions from local authority primary, secondary and special schools, by type of exclusion.

	1998/1999	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002
Total All Exclusions	34,831	38,769	38,656	37,442
Temporary	34,630	38,409	38,334	37,110
Total Removed from Register	201	360	322	332

(Source: Scottish Executive National Statistics Publication - Exclusions From Schools, 2001/2002 Revised 21 July 2003)

Since 1999/2000 the number of exclusions has fallen year on year - to 37,442 in 2001/02. However, despite this decrease in the actual number of children excluded, the underlying trend shows a percentage increase in the use of exclusion, from 46 exclusions per 1,000 pupils in Scotland in 1998/99, to 50 exclusions per 1,000 pupils in 2001/2002.

Interestingly, while the number of temporary exclusions fell by three per cent in 2001/02 compared with the number in 2000/01, the number of permanent exclusions rose by three per cent during the same period. Given that, overall, less than 1 per cent of all exclusions are permanent, a rise in the use of permanent exclusions may have particular significance for looked after children since the findings reported in this study and elsewhere suggest that this group are greatly over-represented in the permanently excluded category. Twenty-five per cent of the young people in this sample were permanently excluded/removed from the school register during the study period, including one boy and one girl who had not previously been temporarily excluded.

Close examination of the figures relating to the most socially vulnerable groups of children show that while exclusion rates among young people who receive free school meals has remained consistently high (47% in 1998/99 and 1999/2000, 45% in 2001/02) and the rate of exclusion of children with Records of Special Education Needs has remained consistently low (3% in 1998/99, 4% in 1999/200 and 2001/02), the proportion of looked after young people in the excluded figures has fallen from 13 per cent in 1998/99 to 3 per cent in 2001/02. Despite this striking reduction, however, looked after children remain more disproportionately represented in the exclusion rates than other groups, representing only 1 per cent of the school population yet 3 per cent of those excluded.

Gender and exclusion from school

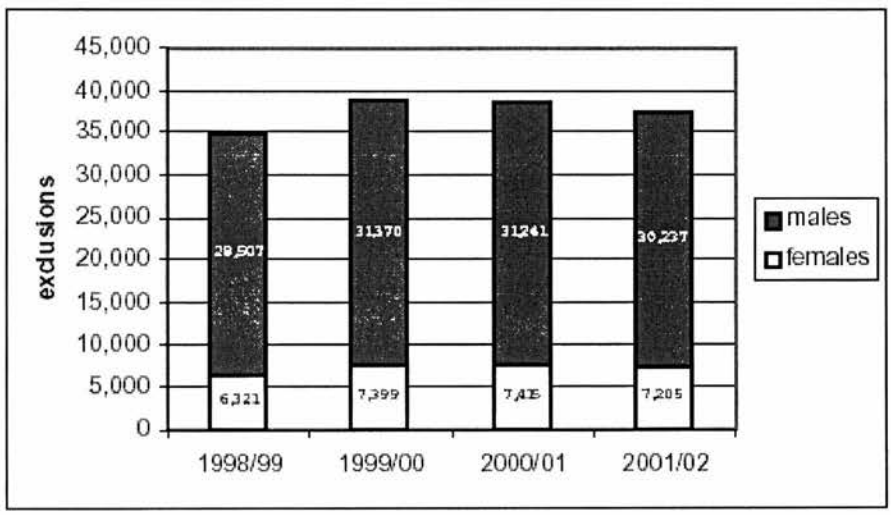
While national statistics show that, in general, male pupils are much more likely to be excluded from secondary schools than girls, this was not so for the young people in this study sample. Here there was not such a large discrepancy, particularly in relation to temporary exclusion - 42 per cent of the girls had experienced exclusion and 55 per cent of the boys. However, there are some interesting distinctions between the experiences of the two groups and these are considered in more detail below together with some general trends in residential child-care services which may account for the inordinately high level of exclusion among this group of looked after young people.

Official statistics show that a number of groups are disproportionately likely to be excluded including black and ethnic minority children (Ince, 1998) children with special needs, and children who are looked after by the local authority (Social Exclusion Unit 1998). A DfEE report (1999c) found that children with statements of special educational need were seven times more likely to be permanently excluded from school and African-Caribbean children six times more likely. Boys represented 84% of all permanently excluded children in England and Wales in 1997/98.

In fact, all the available research into the general issue of school exclusion concurs that boys are four times more likely to be excluded than girls, accounting for about 80% of those excluded from school (Ofsted 1996; SEU, 1998; Hayden and Dunne, 2001; DfES 2002; Scottish Executive, 2003b). Figures for the gender distribution of school exclusions in Scotland show that the overall pattern has remained fairly constant throughout the period that statistical information has been gathered, that is, 1998/99 – 2001/02 (See Figure 5).

Figure 5

Total number of exclusions from local authority primary, secondary and special schools, by gender and year.



(Source: Scottish Executive National Statistics Publication - Exclusions From Schools, 2001/2002 Revised 21 July 2003)

Boys are also the predominant group in the residential child-care population. Official statistics show that two thirds of children in residential accommodation in Scotland are boys (Scottish Executive, 2003b). The proportion of boys to girls has remained relatively constant for several years. Furthermore, two thirds of young people in residential care are aged between 11 and 15 years old, overlapping to a great extent with the peak ages for school exclusions. Thus, by virtue of both their age and gender, the majority of the population of young people in residential care fall into the category of those most likely to be at risk of exclusion from school. Considered together with the evidence that a high proportion have pre-existing school related

problems, the higher concentration of boys in residential care may partially help to explain the disproportionate rates of exclusion among this sub-group of looked after children.

Though little attention has been given in previous research to the experiences of girls who are excluded from school, the data obtained here suggest that the complexity and severity of their pre-care experiences may also provide the principle explanation as to why girls in residential care are more likely to be excluded than girls in the wider school population. To develop our understanding of this phenomenon it is necessary to turn to a consideration of significant changes and shifts in the general pattern of residential child-care services.

Since 1976 the number of children in residential care in Scotland has fallen by almost three-quarters, from 6,336 then to 1,595 in March 2002 (Scottish Executive, 2003c). Moreover, in 1977, 33 per cent of children in residential care were aged 5-11 years. By comparison, in March 2002, only 10 per cent of children in residential accommodation were aged 5-10 years and 90 per cent were over 11 years old. During this period of change the size of children's homes has also reduced dramatically and the majority do not now provide education on-site. Young people, regardless of their individual educational circumstances, are therefore usually expected to attend local mainstream schools.

The dramatic reduction in the number of children in residential care during the last twenty-five years or so has thus resulted in a service that caters predominantly for adolescents. Furthermore, as the numbers have reduced, studies have found that those who remain represent a group of more difficult, 'hard core' cases whose reasons for entry into care are multi-layered and complex (Berridge and Brodie, 1998; Sinclair and Gibbs, 1998; Triseliotis *et al.,* 1995). These studies have shown that the most common reasons for entry into public care are behavioural difficulties, the breakdown in relationships at home, and schooling problems. Consequently, it seems that there is now a much higher concentration of young people in residential care who are likely to experience educational difficulties (Brodie, 2001).

Initial analysis of the data reported here supports the view that changes in the residential care population have resulted in much more complex and demanding cases than previously and that the complexity of their difficulties has contributed to a higher intensity of school related problems among these young people.

The data show that the girls in the study were almost as likely to experience exclusion from school as the boys. However, more detailed scrutiny shows some important differences –differences that appear to reflect a broader tendency in schools to operate a degree of discrimination in their responses to boys compared to girls.

For example, it is notable that although the girls in the group were, proportionately, just as likely as the boys were to be *temporarily* excluded from school, boys were five times more likely to be *permanently* excluded than the girls were. Moreover, on the whole, the girls fared better than the boys did in terms of being enrolled in mainstream schools, with fifteen of the nineteen girls in the sample registered in mainstream schools but only two of the nine boys. This despite the fact that issues such as truancy continued to be apparent for several of these girls. The scope of this study did not incorporate detailed examination of these issues and it is therefore difficult to be clear about the reasons for these findings. However, the data present two possible scenarios: either, the boys' behaviour was much more disruptive than the girls, necessitating stronger response measures; or schools were generally more tolerant of the girls' behaviour.

According to Brodie (2001), research suggests that gender difference can be related to the former of these explanations, that is, the fact that the most common reason for exclusion is disruptive or aggressive behaviour and this is more likely to be displayed by boys and to be perceived as troublesome by teachers. A National Children's Bureau (NCB) study (Osler *et al.,* 2002) of 81 girls of secondary school age in six local authority areas in England found that the girls perceived boys to be more frequently subject to disciplinary sanctions because they tend to present a more direct challenge to authority by engaging in forms of behaviour that are more difficult to

ignore in the school setting, such as fighting and overtly physically or verbally aggressive behaviours.

However, the NCB study also found that the discrepancy is explained partially in terms of the less visible nature of some girls' problems and it reflects how girls manage problems, some of which may go unnoticed within schools. For example, the investigation found that, unlike many boys, girls experiencing difficulties are less likely to engage in behaviour that attracts the attention of school authorities and support systems. Internalised responses such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and self-harming behaviour can be overlooked or assumed to relate to problems beyond, rather than within, school. A recurring theme arising in that research was the way in which girls' needs are overlooked and resources for disaffected pupils are largely directed towards boys. The NCB study found that girls are generally not a priority in schools' thinking about behaviour management and school exclusion. Even when concerns are recognised, they are often over-shadowed by the difficulties of managing the much greater numbers of boys. Thus, greater exclusion rates among boys appear to reflect a degree of structural discrimination within the education system.

Discrimination apparently also exists at the individual level, with teachers responding differently to boys' and girls' behaviour in schools. Throughout the NCB study, a typical response from professionals was that girls were 'not a problem' and it was only by exploring their responses in more depth that widespread concerns became more evident. Professionals suggested that girls' greater adaptability to the academic routines of school, conscious use of social skills and different teacher perceptions of similar behaviour based on gender, contributed to the lower permanent exclusion rates of girls and the view that girls are 'not a problem'. The link between criminality and boys' exclusion from school, as well as the widespread perception that girls are doing well academically in school in comparison to boys, was also seen as contributing.

If these findings are typical of schools more generally, then it seems that a combination of institutional and individual discrimination may operate within schools which leads to boys being at a much higher risk of permanent exclusion from school than girls. Since adolescent boys represent the largest proportion of children in residential care and most tend to have multiple needs that can result in behaviour that is likely to lead to exclusion, we can begin to see why permanent exclusion rates are so high in this group. Being aware of the heightened risk to boys in public care is therefore particularly important and should alert social workers, carers and teachers to ensure that specific arrangements and support measures are in place for these young people from the outset of their care placements.

However, concern about the risk of exclusion among girls in residential care should also be high. Although the findings here and elsewhere suggest that schools operate a higher threshold of tolerance in relation to girls, and that permanent exclusion is less likely to result for them, nevertheless the high proportion of temporary excluded girls in this study indicates that girls in residential care are also at higher risk of exclusion compared with their peers and this too needs to be addressed in practice.

Socio-Economic Factors Leading to Exclusion

Combating the risk of school exclusion from the earliest possible stage is extremely important for looked after children for a variety of reasons. The research evidence that is presently available suggests that two statements can be made with a degree of certainty. First, only a minority of permanently excluded pupils return to full-time mainstream education - for example, a survey of local education authorities in England (Parsons *et al.,* 1994) calculated that only 18.5% of permanently excluded pupils returned to mainstream schools. Second, young people who are permanently excluded are disproportionately likely to be involved in criminal behaviour (Audit Commission, 1996). Permanent exclusion can therefore have a devastating long-term effect on the lives and educational opportunities of the young people concerned and, given the already poor outcomes for looked after children, this additional jeopardy is a major concern.

As discussed above, although the effect of gender on the experiences of permanent exclusion among looked after children may be significant for boys, it does not fully explain the exceedingly high level of all types of exclusion for this population of young people. It is important that other features of their circumstances are also taken into account. In particular, current knowledge of the characteristics that contribute to high levels of school exclusion suggests that one of the main reasons that both girls and boys in the study were equally likely to experience temporary exclusion is that their family and background circumstances reflected similarly high levels of disadvantage and disruption.

While exclusion rates vary greatly from school to school, they tend to be higher in areas of social deprivation and the majority of the young people investigated here, both boys and girls, originated from socially deprived backgrounds. Certainly, many detrimental family and environmental factors were greatly in evidence among their home circumstances. Poverty and low social capital was apparent in a high number of the cases in the sample, most were living either in local authority, housing association, or private rented accommodation and a high percentage of the families were dependent on state benefits as their main source of income. Furthermore, a substantial proportion of the young people were from reconfigured or lone parent families and slightly more than half had experienced abuse or neglect.

The link between educational attainment and home background has been firmly established in education research (e.g. Rutter *et al.,* 1975). That there is a connection between school exclusion and social exclusion is also increasingly being recognised in government policy. As shown earlier, comparison with the overall school population shows that disadvantaged pupils such as those entitled to free school meals, or with a Record of Needs, or looked after by the local authority, have higher exclusion rates than other pupils. (DfEE, 1999c; Osler *et al.,* 2002; SEU, 1998; Scottish Executive, 2003b).

There can be little doubt then that the school experience of most children is directly associated with their wider social circumstances, including their experiences of inequalities, poverty and disadvantage. The level of association between these non-school factors and rates of exclusion is therefore a serious concern for those working with looked after youngsters because these are the factors that commonly affect this group of children.

A relatively recent Ofsted report (1996) describes the family backgrounds of excluded pupils as 'a grim catalogue of misery'. Such a description could appropriately be applied to the young people in this study since, as already shown, several adverse personal, social and economic factors such as unemployment, low-incomes, lone-parenthood and poor housing were among the more negative features found in their home circumstances. Furthermore, there were major risks associated with family breakdown in many of the cases and there was strong evidence of poor relationships and behaviour difficulties both at home and in school.

These adverse factors undoubtedly had a bearing on the increased likelihood of their being excluded from school. Moreover, it has been found that exclusion is consistently associated with limited aspirations and expectations, poor relationships with other pupils, parents and teachers and pressure from other pupils to perform in ways that lead to conflict with authority (Ofsted, 1996). These factors therefore also appear pertinent to young people in local authority residential care since, in many of the cases in this investigation, the main problem described by care staff was that there were very poor relationships between the young people and their parents. Respondents stated that some parents did not wish to have involvement with their children, and rejection by their parents was regarded as a common issue for a number of the young people.

There are strong indications then, that the disadvantaged social circumstances that typify the backgrounds of many young people in the care system are a major contributing factor to the high levels of exclusion among these children. Furthermore, lack of parental encouragement and support, stemming from poor

relationships at home, add to their level of risk. The presence of such multiple 'risk factors' among the study group give a clear indication as to why looked after young people have a higher likelihood of exclusion.

The Social Exclusion Unit Report (SEU, 1998) has identified a number of reasons for increased exclusions and many of the young people in this investigation were affected by a combination of these. These reasons include:

- Poor acquisition of basic skills
- Limited pupil aspirations
- Social and family risk factors
- Poor pupil relationships with teachers
- Pressures on schools to increase academic standards
- Publication of school performance tables
- Inappropriate curricula for those who have 'fallen behind' in class
- Lack of training for teachers in handling behaviour difficulties

The unacceptably high level of exclusion among young people in public care is an issue that merits further attention at national and local policy levels. Exclusion from school can lead to an ongoing cycle of social exclusion within families and communities (Brodie, 2001) and cause long-term damage to a child's capacity to participate in economic and social life. Prevention of additional difficulties becomes more difficult once the initial decision to exclude has occurred and the range of alternative options is reduced.

Encouragingly, some signs are beginning to emerge that, in Scotland, the percentage of looked after children being excluded is reducing. Statistics for the period 1998-2002 show that while 13 per cent of excluded pupils in the school year 1998/99 were looked after, this reduced to 8 per cent during 1999/2000 and was further reduced to 3 per cent in 2001/02. However, there is no room for complacency as the most recent statistics show that while the rate of exclusion among the general school population

is 50 per 1000 pupils, the rate for looked after children is 227 per 1000 (Scottish Executive, 2004).

While an association between social deprivation and the rate of exclusion in schools has been established in most of the literature, and confirmed in the findings reported here, such an association is not inevitable and it must not be assumed that exclusion among a disproportionate number of looked after youngsters is inescapable. Variations in exclusion rates have been found between different local authorities (Ofsted, 1996; DfEE, 2000a, cited in Brodie, 2001) and these differences cannot simply be explained by the socio-economic characteristics of these areas. Such differences therefore raise questions regarding the strategies used by different schools to avoid exclusion and whether sufficient attention is given to the strategic development of inclusive policies at both local and national level.

Developing Inclusive Policy and Practice

Inclusive education is not a reality for all and it is vital that those charged with providing a quality education to children who have different abilities or face a range of challenges know what is likely to prove effective in helping *all* pupils within the education system to succeed to the best of their ability (Sebba and Sachdev 1997). Usually, the discourse concerning inclusive education relates to those children and young people who, traditionally, have been regarded as having 'special educational needs'. Given all the indications reported in this study that young people in residential care have extraordinary educational needs and the belief in some quarters that looked after children, in general, require special education measures, it is perhaps timely to consider whether a broader interpretation of the statutory requirements relating to inclusive education for children with 'special educational needs' might enhance the education of this vulnerable group.

The term 'special educational needs' has usually been used in relation to individual children who have specific learning difficulties that arise from innate characteristics. However, research evidence about the poor educational performance of children in

public care is now sufficiently established for some to suggest that the term should be broadly applied to this group of young people (Fletcher-Campbell, 1997).

Special Education Policy for Looked After Children

In the main, service providers have tended to address the 'special educational needs' of children within tightly drawn parameters. They have done so by adopting an individualistic approach to assessing children's needs and by resisting the notion that certain groups or categories of children, such as looked after children, might fall into the definition. While it is not argued here that adopting such a wholesale approach is desirable, nevertheless, examination of the relevant statutory provision suggests that the architects of the legislation held a much broader vision of how the term 'special educational need' might be defined in practice.

Of course, the potentially stigmatising impact of widening the use of the term, to incorporate young people in public care, can be taken as a valid reason for rejecting such an idea in principle. However, it is important to at least consider whether the scope of the statutory responsibilities for children with special educational needs, and the measures that have been attached to these responsibilities, have been fully utilised to serve the needs of looked after children. The view adopted here is that it is better to countenance the possibility, if it leads to an overall improvement in the quality of educational experience, than to reject it out of hand.

Some groups of children in the United States are recognised as being at risk of educational failure and this categorisation may stem from adverse social circumstances as well as academic assessment of learning ability. Jackson and Sachdev (2001) argue strongly that the concept of 'educationally-at-risk' children could usefully be adopted to support the development of measures to compensate for these risks and to promote better educational outcomes for looked after children.

Special Education – The Warnock Committee

The Education (Scotland) Act 1945, like the 1944 Education Act in England and Wales, placed responsibility for the provision of effective and efficient primary and secondary education firmly within the duties of the local education authorities. Interestingly, considering the current rhetoric about social inclusion, it was viewed as a landmark piece of legislation that was intended to promote educational opportunity for all and it established a vision that all children would be catered for in mainstream schools (Part II, section 40-42). The 'inclusive' nature of the legislation was such that it incorporated children with specific needs such as children with social, emotional and behavioural problems, as well as children with disabilities.

Such was the impact of the 1945 Act that, following its implementation, unease grew about the use of special schools for certain categories of children and the philosophy of segregating children from mainstream education became increasingly questioned until, in 1973, the Warnock Committee was established. The remit of the committee was to review the provision of education in England, Wales and Scotland for children with particular educational needs. When the report of the committee was published in 1978 it proposed the use of the term 'special educational needs' for such children and contained more than 220 recommendations about appropriate educational provision (Warnock, 1978).

The committee formed the view that these 'special' needs might take a variety of forms and occur over a range of severity, thus defining special education more widely than it had previously been defined. Indeed, the report proposed that education provision should be delivered on a more flexible model and that special education should no longer be synonymous with special schooling. Rather, the committee envisaged a more inclusive policy with the maximum integration of children with special educational needs into mainstream schools, though recognising that for some children whose integration was impractical, special schools would still be required. A variety of levels and types of integration were envisaged including, locational, social and functional and, academic. However, despite the breadth of

definition of the term 'special educational needs' there was resistance in practice to the idea of encompassing certain categories or groups, like children in public care.

Notwithstanding this reluctance to apply the term more broadly, the report nevertheless highlights a number of important principles that, based on the evidence obtained in this study, would have merit in addressing the educational needs of young people in residential care as well as children with specific learning difficulties. For example, one of the main features of the report is that it emphasised the importance of identifying and responding to, at the earliest opportunity, children's special educational needs. Additionally, the important role that parents play in educating their children was acknowledged and the principle of partnership between parents and schools, with parents having the right to participate in decisions about their children's education, was stressed. Another of the important proposals was that parents should have the right to request an assessment of their child's educational needs and that the education authority should have a duty to provide one, if it was felt to be in the child's best interests. These measures, if applied to young people in residential care, would establish a sound basis for effective practice.

Though, for many, the Warnock Report represented a positive forward step, in the eyes of others it did not achieve enough in altering the balance of power between parents and professionals (Kirp, 1982). Critics also argued that the report failed to recognise the many underlying social factors that were significant influences on the educational experiences of children (Weddell, 1990). Despite the criticisms, the report was extremely influential in the drafting of new legislation, the Education Act 1981 in England and Wales and the Education (Scotland) Act 1981. These Acts allowed for the assessment of a child's educational needs, leading, where appropriate, to a 'Statement' in England and Wales or a 'Record of Needs' in Scotland. The Record of Needs was intended not only to identify the nature of the child's needs but also what measures the education authority proposed to take in order to meet these needs. However, while the legislation in England and Wales included a commitment to integrating children into mainstream schools, the Scottish legislation did not make such a commitment (Riddell and Brown, 1994).

The Education (Scotland) Act 1981 states that a child has a 'learning difficulty' if he has significantly greater difficulty learning than the majority of children or if he suffers from a disability which either prevents or hinders him from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of his age (section 1 (5)(d)). This definition was critical in terms of determining the statutory duties of the local education authority and is, potentially, particularly relevant to the needs of children who are looked after away from home. Crucially, however, it relied upon interpretation at both individual and policy levels and, in the main, such interpretation tended to focus on the inherent factors that constrain an individual's learning rather than their socio-economic circumstances, which, in the case of looked after children, as exemplified by the young people in this study, are often equally debilitating.

The Warnock Report (1978) extended the definition of the term 'special educational needs' to include the large number of low achieving, mainly working class, pupils – in fact, those pupils who often live in the kind of disadvantaged circumstances that are most likely to lead to episodes in care. However, many professionals argue that, far from being special, these children's needs are completely normal. Thus the concept of special educational needs has been the focus of criticism since it has been central to the question of duties and responsibilities (Goacher *et al*, 1988)

The issue of whether a child may be suffering from educational disadvantage or poor performance as a consequence of stressful home circumstances has always been a particularly complex point when viewed in relation to looked after children. While it may be true that such circumstances could have implications for the child's school performance in terms of motivation, behaviour or schoolwork, for some it is misleading to equate this with special educational needs. Thus the criteria for using the term have been confusing, leading some commentators to conclude that this is one of the more problematic areas in education legislation (Adams, 1986; Galloway *et al*, 1994). Norwich (1990) has argued that there is a need for more effective national and local criteria that will allow the latter to specify appropriate thresholds for meeting local conditions without excessive constraints being imposed by the

former. The primary emphasis should be on assessing the child's individual needs and functioning in context.

While many have argued that the education arrangements for looked after children should be no different to those for any other children, the notion of applying positive discrimination and discrete support has gained ground in other quarters in recent years. Fletcher-Campbell (1997) has proposed, with some considerable justification, that children coming into care experience fragmentation and disjunction, not only in their family circumstances but also within the care system itself. While she does not suggest that looked after children necessarily have special education needs within the normal terms of the definition, nevertheless, she proposes that they do have special needs that arise from their care environment rather than the learning environment. The findings reported earlier in this study also support the view that young people in public care experience significant levels of disruption in their lives and that their education appears to be a casualty of that disruption.

Of course, within the looked after population there is a range of ability - from those who may well have special learning needs within the accepted definition, to others that are academically able and have the capacity to go on to further and higher education. Notwithstanding this, Fletcher-Campbell (ibid) argues that, as a group, they merit special consideration by virtue of their looked after status and the fact that they suffer disadvantage by the very nature of the consequences of being looked after. In her view, when young people come into care, by whatever route and for whatever reason, they may not be able to make 'normal' responses due to the instability and fragmentation they experience in their lives. Consequently, she believes that many of the provisions of special education are relevant to their circumstances. She stresses that many who are committed to providing discrete educational support for looked after children perceive it as a means of ensuring entitlement and restoring what would 'normally' accrue to them in different circumstances. Thus, she suggests, those who are involved in providing effective education to this group are becoming increasingly aware that their role consists of

both repairing the damage caused by instability and fragmentation and also using education plans to complement and sometimes fulfil care placement plans.

Under the Education (Scotland) Act 1981, education authorities in Scotland have been required to put strategies in place for identifying those children who have special educational needs. However, the aim is not simply to assess and identify need but also to ensure that suitable forms of education are provided for children with those needs and, thereafter, to monitor their progress. The advantages of applying such measures to looked after children could have a substantial bearing on the future educational progress and outcomes of this group. However, for such strategies to be effective requires the involvement of a variety of agencies and professionals. Indeed, effective collaboration is increasingly being viewed as the key to success in this field. The Education authority has a duty under section 60 (1) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1981 to disseminate information in their area about the importance of early identification of special educational needs and the opportunities for assessment. Thus parents, carers and social workers, who may have an important role, should be fully advised about any concerns the education authority has about a child. They should also be involved, formally and informally, in devising strategies to respond to the child's needs.

Other aspects of the legislation could also have been usefully applied to children in residential care. Section 61(b) of the 1981 Act, for example, provided for a parent to request an assessment from the education authority to determine whether his/her child required a 'Record of Needs' and the authority was required to provide one unless satisfied that the request was unreasonable.

The process of observation and assessment, where agreed, had to include educational, psychological and medical assessments and, in some cases, advice from social work authorities. Whether or not a 'Record of Needs' was opened for the child, the underlying principle of the legislation was that he or she would have a better chance of receiving the appropriate quality of education if his or her needs were assessed thoroughly. Taking the experiences of the young people in this sample

as an indication of the overall difficulties encountered by young people in residential care, it is clear that the advantages of adopting such an approach for this group would have had a significant impact on their performance and attainment.

The Kilbrandon Committee (1964) proposed the establishment of the 'Social Education Department' which would have brought together both education and social services for children. The report of the committee envisaged a much closer relationship between these two departments than resulted from the organisation of social work services under the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. The unified social work departments that were established under the 1968 Act were intended to bring together services for all people who were in need rather than just children. In this respect, the new social work departments were much more broadly based than Kilbrandon had envisaged (Bruce, 1978). Although the 'Social Education Department' proposed by Kilbrandon was never established, the 1966 White Paper, 'Social Work in the Community', stressed the need for co-operation among services as a prerequisite for the effectiveness of the new social work departments.

A decade later, the Warnock Committee (1978) also emphasised the need for inter-professional collaboration, as well as accentuating the importance of parental participation in decision making. Early identification and accurate assessment of children's educational needs was seen as a cornerstone in the successful construction of educational programmes for children with 'special needs'. Consequently, Warnock (1978, para.15.42) recommended close involvement of social work personnel in many cases where the local education authority was carrying out an assessment of a child's needs. It followed from this that mainstream schools should have a close relationship with local social work teams in order to have easy access to a child's social background information. The report of the committee (1978, para.2.73) also suggested that, in cases of referral for formal assessment, social services departments should always be informed to allow them to make a contribution to the process if they wished. Additionally, it was proposed that social services should be informed of the decision to open a 'Record of Needs' for a child so that social work support could be provided for the family, if they wished it.

These recommendations were incorporated into the Education (Scotland) Act 1981 and subsequent guidance (Scottish Office Circular 4/96, 1996a) stressed that whether or not a Record of Needs was opened, early assessment was vital to ensure the best quality of educational provision for children with particular needs. Close co-operation between parents and all the statutory agencies was seen as central to this process, together with a full understanding by each of the participants in the part that the others played (para.67.17). The guidance noted that children with special educational needs might also have specific social or care needs and that if these were attended to it might have a positive effect on their educational performance. Thus, education authorities were advised to seek the advice and support of the social work department at an early stage in the assessment process (para.94).

Current legislative changes in Scotland reflect many of the 'inclusive' underlying principles that were first promoted by Warnock and suggest that the debate about widening the scope of 'special needs' measures has finally resulted in a significant shift. The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 heralds the introduction of a new definition of special education needs and has adopted new terminology which reflects the more inclusive nature of the policy agenda.

Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004

The concept of additional support needs in the new Act encompasses a broad group of children and young people whose needs have to be identified, understood and addressed.

Section 1 of the Act sets out the definition of additional support needs, as follows.

1) A child or young person has additional support needs for the purposes of this Act where, *for whatever reason*, the child or young person is, or is likely to be, unable without the provision of additional support to benefit from school education provided or to be provided for the child or young person. (italics added)

The change in terminology, from 'special educational needs' (SEN) to 'additional support needs' (ASN), marks a major watershed in the development of education policy. Until the introduction of the new legislation education authorities had a duty to identify which children and young people have special educational needs that meet the criteria for a Record of Needs. The new term is undoubtedly more inclusive, less stigmatising and may help to avoid negative labelling because it recognises that many children will need additional support at some time or other and that some additional support needs may be transient while others are much longer term.

Given the scope of the definition, the additional support needs framework may be relevant for children who are looked after away from home - particularly since it is acknowledged that there is a wide range of factors and circumstances which may lead to some children and young people having a need for additional support, including:

- **Family circumstances** - for example, where a child's home life is disrupted

- **Children in need of care and protection** - for example, looked after children or children at risk

- **Social and emotional** – for example, pupils who have experienced bullying, or pupils experiencing difficulty forming social attachments. Behavioural difficulties may require additional support, for example, where it is felt a pupil may respond to approaches to develop positive behaviour, may be involved in offending or who is at risk of exclusion.

Education authorities must make arrangements for identifying those children and young people who have additional support needs and what those needs are (s 6 (1)). Identifying additional support needs is about identifying difficulties with learning and how these might best be overcome. Some children and young people may have physical or sensory impairments, or significant emotional difficulties, or face extremely challenging circumstances in their home lives. Assessment has to consider

the child, his or her circumstances, and how these impact on the child's learning. Among other things, under the Act education authorities must:

- make adequate and efficient provision for each child or young person with additional support needs for whose education they are responsible
- make arrangements to identify additional support needs
- provide those children or young people who need it with a Co-ordinated Support Plan (CSP) and keep this under regular review
- provide independent and free mediation services for all parents of children with additional support needs and publish information on these services
- provide access to dispute resolution services for all parents of children with additional support needs
- request, and take account of, information and advice from agencies likely to support the child when he/she leaves school
- provide information to whichever agencies will be responsible for supporting the young person once they leave school, including Further Education Colleges, if the young person agrees

A need for additional support should not imply that a child or young person lacks abilities or skills and an education authority must prepare a CSP for a child or young person when the child or young person has additional support needs arising from-

(i) one or more complex factors, or
(ii) multiple factors,
(iii) those needs are likely to continue for more than a year

Complex and multiple factors
The Act states that a complex factor is one which has, or is likely to have, a significant adverse effect on the school education of the child or young person. A complex factor will affect most aspects of learning and may be a long-term educational, medical or other factor. For example, a complex factor could arise from severe learning difficulties, a sensory impairment such as blindness, or a physical

disability such as cerebral palsy or other conditions such as autistic spectrum disorder. More than one complex factor may be present.

Multiple factors

These are factors which are not by themselves complex factors, but taken together, have or are likely to have a significant adverse effect on the school education of the child or young person. In all cases it is how these factors impact on the child's learning that is important. Those best placed to decide whether or not factors are complex or multiple are those working with the child or young person, as well as the parents, and of course the child or young person.

What may be complex, or multiple, factors for one child may not be for another. It is the effect of the factor(s) on school education that is important, not any diagnostic label alone and every child or young person should be considered on an individual basis.

Monitoring and review

Education authorities must make appropriate arrangements for keeping under consideration the additional support needs of, and the adequacy of additional support provided to, each child and young person for whose education they are responsible and the adequacy of additional support provided for each child and young person with additional support needs (s4 (1) (b)).

Education authorities, with appropriate agencies, should monitor the progress of children and young people who have additional support needs to ensure that they are learning effectively and making adequate progress. Where children and young people are not making adequate progress as expected, the child's needs should be re-assessed and appropriate support provided.

Assessment

Under the new legislation parents can request that a detailed specialist assessment is carried out and the education authority must comply unless the request is unreasonable. The Act requires that a request must be in writing and must contain a

statement of the reasons for making the request. Once an assessment request has been made the process should be managed by appropriate staff within the school or other appropriate agencies (s28).

Where assessment is required, the process should seek multi-agency consultation and/or collaborative working. It should ensure that links are made amongst other professionals involved and include discussion with parents and professionals involved with the child or young person. Moreover, the authority should always endeavour to seek the views of the child or young person and should build on other assessment information already available.

The evidence obtained in this investigation suggests that the measures outlined above, if applied, will be of great benefit to children in residential care. Early comprehensive assessment of educational needs, closer collaboration between social work and education services, greater parental participation and clearer definition of roles and responsibilities are all key elements of the policy relating to children with a 'additional support needs'. In light of the catalogue of obstacles and problems that beset the educational performance of the young people in this investigation, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that the basic requirements and duties associated with this new legislation could, indeed should, be applied to all children in public care. The potential benefits accruing from such measures appear to greatly outweigh the short term hazards that may result from the stigmatising effect that some suggest would follow.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CONCLUSION

"If we are serious about building a prosperous, fair and strong society, then every child, whatever their background, must have the chance to make the most of their talents and potential. That's true of a child in care as much as any other....the Government is committed to giving children in care all the same life chances any parent would give their child and none is more important than a good education which is crucial to a brighter future" (Tony Blair, Social Exclusion Unit, 2003).

Introduction

This study has sought to highlight the nature of the educational experience of a sample of young people in residential care. The complex and multi-dimensional characteristics of the topic have raised several significant issues regarding socio-economic, structural, procedural and professional factors that contribute to what is widely recognised as an unacceptable situation for children in public care. It is apparent that children in the care system are failing in terms of their school performance and the results obtained in this investigation add to the conviction that their poor educational outcomes can be attributed to broader social factors and failures within the corporate system of education and care, rather than simply to the young people themselves.

Though the fieldwork for this study was undertaken before current legislation and subsequent policy initiatives were introduced in the late 1990s, there is much evidence from more recent investigations and reports to suggest that the findings and conclusions arising from this research remain valid today (e.g. Dixon and Stein, 2002; HMI/SWSI, 2001). As stated in the introduction to this thesis, there is compelling evidence that young people in public care today fare no better educationally than their counterparts did two or three decades ago. The most recent

report by Audit Scotland (2005), for example, shows that in the year 2003/04 just 40% of care leavers in Scotland achieved the Scottish Executive's target of standard grades in English and Maths – an increase of only 4% on the previous year's figures.

This concluding chapter therefore underlines the significant issues identified by this research. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the study before proceeding to summarise the key findings. It is acknowledged that the small size of the study sample imposes limitations on the degree to which the findings can be generalised but, taken together with the body of research evidence that has emerged from other studies in this field, it is contended that the results of the research raise important matters that have implications for future, policy and practice and these matters give rise to a number of recommendations. Finally, several suggestions are offered concerning areas for future research.

Overview of the Study

This investigation has examined the educational experiences and circumstances of a sample of twenty-eight young people in seven residential care homes in a large local authority in Scotland. All of the young people were secondary school aged. The aims of the research were four-fold, namely:

- To examine and describe the level and degree of educational difficulty that the young people brought to their care episode
- To consider how their educational circumstances and performance were affected by their care experience
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the education component of the Assessment and Action Record in relation to the educational progress of a sub-set of the study sample

- To explore the views and experiences of the carers concerning the process of using the AAR materials and the potential benefits, deficits, obstacles and rewards of the system.

The results of the research must be seen within the limitations of the scope and methodology. In particular, the sample size was relatively small and the sub-set of children with whom the Assessment and Action Records were used involved only six young people. The range of research methods used in the study, including the examination of documentary sources of data, semi-structured interviews and a quasi-experiment design, were chosen to maximise the likelihood of achieving the study aims. In the event, the degree to which the research aims were realised was compromised by difficulties in tracing school records for the majority of the young people in the study sample. This problem meant that it was not possible to evaluate the impact of the Assessment and Action Records on the school performance of the sample.

Notwithstanding this major setback the study obtained important data concerning the backgrounds and home circumstances of the young people, their reasons for coming into contact with social work services, their school experiences before and after coming into care, issues relating to their care placements and details of the interplay between their school and care careers.

Moreover, though it did not prove possible to measure the effect of the LAC materials on the educational progress of individual children, residential workers provided important insights into the operation of the system and highlighted a number of positive features as well as some of the potential barriers and drawbacks that may be encountered in future practice.

Cumulatively, the study has produced a number of findings that both confirm aspects of the existing body of work in this field and also add to our understanding of the complex issues that are at play.

Key Findings

This investigation has identified a number of key concerns in relation to the study sample that may underlie and contribute to the poor educational performance of children in public care more generally. These can be summarised as follows:

- The lives of the majority of young people in the sample were characterised by social disadvantage and fractured relationships. These factors appear to have had a damaging effect on their educational performance before they come into the care system.
- Signs of difficulties appeared early in the school careers of a high proportion of the children who later become accommodated. However, there was little evidence that these difficulties were effectively addressed at that stage.
- Problems at home and in the school circumstances of a number of the young people were often acted out through difficult behaviour and this increased their vulnerability to exclusion from school and to other school problems.
- Disproportionately high levels of school exclusion among the young people in the sample meant that a significant proportion of them spent too much time out of school.
- Instability in every area of their lives was a common characteristic that adversely affected their capacity to sustain learning and development.
- Failure to maintain adequate records and to closely monitor the educational progress of the majority of the sample inevitably resulted in poorer outcomes for these young people.
- Education was not afforded a sufficiently high degree of priority in the care arrangements of a substantial proportion of young people in the study.
- Support arrangements for the young people's schoolwork were poor and carers needed to raise the level of their expectations as well as their intervention in this area.

- Collaboration and channels of communication between education and social work staff were poor, resulting in limited information exchange.
- More detailed assessment of the risk and protective factors in young people's lives was needed and more emphasis should have been given to promoting the strengths identified and encouraging the young people's educational development in its broadest sense.
- The majority of young people in the sample were, by definition, 'educationally-at-risk' and there appeared to be a need for more inclusive school policies and broader interpretation of the 'special educational needs' legislation to include young people in residential care in the definition of children requiring 'additional support for learning'.
- Parents were not fully involved in the educational arrangements of their children and, although challenging, this is an extremely important area of work that was largely neglected by the care workers.

Recommendations

1. The findings show that difficulties at school were apparent from an early age for a relatively high proportion of young people in the sample and in most cases these difficulties persisted at the time they were placed in care. In fact, the study indicates that problems at school often begin long before social work services become involved and continue long after. However, there was little evidence of effective measures of early intervention in school to stem the pattern of deterioration and disruption resulting for these children.

Recommendation – *Where education or social difficulties arise early in a child's school career, local education authorities, working in collaboration with all other relevant agencies, must ensure that a detailed and comprehensive assessment of the child's needs is undertaken. Teachers should seek to retain such children within*

inclusive mainstream classes to avoid the possibility of establishing an early pattern of disruption in their school lives.

2. The results show that many of the young people's lives prior to placement in local authority care were characterised by socio-economic disadvantage, most had experienced fractured family relationships and a relatively high proportion had experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse. All of these factors are known to have a detrimental impact on the educational progress of children. As with other commentators in this field, this researcher has consequently come to the conclusion that the link between social disadvantage and poor educational performance is one of the most significant factors that undermines young people's capacity to realise their full educational potential after placement.

Recommendation – *Local authorities should undertake a full, multi-disciplinary, education needs assessments of all young people who become looked after away from home. Where required, they should ensure that appropriate additional and compensatory measures of support are put in place to promote their educational performance. A senior member of staff in each school should maintain an overview of looked after children's progress.*

3. Behaviour difficulties, both at home and at school, featured in a high proportion of the sample and the number of young people in the study experiencing problems at school increased over time. The issue of behaviour management is clearly one that has a bearing on the decision-making process within both the education and care systems. Studies have shown that difficult or aggressive behaviour, particularly towards their peers, is the main reason given for school exclusion among primary children (Parsons *et al.,* 1994: Hayden, 1997).

Recommendation – *Local authorities should increase the emphasis they place on early identification of, and response to, behavioural problems. Behaviour management strategies should be devised and implemented in all schools with the aim of diverting children away from the care system and reducing the use of out of*

school alternatives for dealing with behaviour difficulties (such as 'special' day schools).

4. The personal and social problems of the young people in the sample were considerable and it appears that these problems may have increased their vulnerability to school exclusion. The results of the investigation indicate that school exclusion, particularly permanent exclusion, is one of the major obstacles to the educational progress of young people in public care, yet exclusion does nothing to address the underlying factors that make these children vulnerable. Unless alternatives to exclusion can be found it is likely that a high proportion of young people in public care will continue to experience educational disadvantage. Those interviewed in the study did not believe that the Assessment and Action Record is a useful or relevant tool for working with young people who are excluded from school and they expressed concern regarding whether the young people themselves would see any relevance or purpose to the materials if they were excluded. Previous research (Ward, 1995) has found that questions in the education section of the AAR were often disregarded if the young person was not attending school either through truancy or exclusion. School exclusion is an extremely complex and multi-dimensional social phenomenon and it is clear that reductions in the level of exclusions experienced by children in public care will require more effective relationships between professionals and the young people concerned (Brodie, 2001). The LAC materials may offer the potential to be used as effective tools for improving relationships between all the relevant parties but there is, regrettably, little evidence from the views expressed in this study that this potential will be realised without the issue of exclusion being addressed on a broader strategic policy level.

Recommendation – *Except in exceptional circumstances, all looked after children should have permanent full-time education. All local authorities should set targets and introduce positive discrimination measures to reduce the level of school exclusions and ensure that children who are cared for away from home can access full-time mainstream schooling. They should also ensure that all looked after*

children have care plans and placement agreements as specified in current legislation.

5. The majority of the young people's lives were characterised by instability in their home, school and care circumstances with many experiencing multiple care placements and schools. The writer believes that maintaining stability and continuity in young people's lives is critical and he endorses the view expressed in a recent Social Exclusion Report (2003) which highlighted this as one of the 'five big issues' relating to the underachievement of looked after children. Increased emphasis on maintaining stability does not necessarily mean preserving care placements at all costs but it does recognise that stability is important for establishing a secure base, with strong attachments to carers who will promote a child's learning and development.

Recommendation – Social workers and social work managers must increase their emphasis on maintaining stability in care placements and should ensure that carers understand the importance of promoting a child's learning and development. Where changes in care placements do occur, every effort should be made to ensure continuity in other aspects of the young person's life, particularly school and family contacts.

6. Record keeping in both social work and education departments in the study authority was poor. Many important aspects of the young people's lives were missing from their care records and details of their educational performance or progress were almost impossible to obtain, for example, it was not common for care staff in the study to obtain copies of the young people's school reports. This finding may be a reflection of the degree of disruption and movement that typified the young people's experiences but it also reflects a failure on the part of the authority to attach importance to this task. The results obtained here demonstrate that one of the greatest difficulties in managing the educational arrangements of children in care is the organisation and tracking of their school records. Failure to maintain records and to closely monitor the educational

progress of children means that with each subsequent change in their care or school arrangements information becomes increasingly less complete.

Recommendation – *Detailed records of looked after children's educational performance should be maintained by the education authority. Databases should include a separate field for looked after children. Similarly, all social work records should hold copies of the child's school reports (and other relevant school documents) and social work databases should incorporate a field for educational details.*

7. In many cases, communication between frontline staff in social work and education was not well established and there were some indications that there was a lack of trust between the two groups. Concern about the inadequacy of structures and systems to promote more effective joint working between professionals and departments has been expressed in a recent government report (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). The research here suggests that a significant improvement in the educational outcomes of children in public care can only be achieved through closer collaboration between education and social work. This will require greater adherence to the principle of corporate parenting on the part of local authorities, binding relevant professionals into joint policies, procedures and protocols. In some authorities this has led to the merging of education and social work departments and this may ultimately be the most effective way of improving the prospects for children in care.

Recommendation – *Local authorities should implement an integrated policy covering education and social work which ensures that the educational needs of looked after children are met effectively. They should also review their current organisational arrangements with a view to merging education and social services for children and young people.*

8. As with other research findings, the data obtained here suggest that care workers and social workers did not afford high priority to education and they took little interest in the general educational progress of the young people. In general, they provided little support or encouragement for learning and development. Given the findings in this study and elsewhere that children are often already educationally disadvantaged before coming into care, it is crucial that they receive *extra support* for their education rather than having this aspect of their lives neglected. It is clear that there are wide variations between the level and quality of support that is provided, with some authorities or carers providing excellent support while others do not. We know from research that the young people who achieve relatively satisfactory educational outcomes frequently cite the support and encouragement they received from concerned carers as the most significant factor (Jackson, 1998) yet we are far from a situation where the standard of support given is uniformly high.

Recommendation – *Social workers and carers must give higher priority to helping and encouraging young people with their schoolwork. Local authorities should regularly audit residential units to determine whether they are educationally rich environments. Where shortcomings are found, they should make plans to take appropriate action.*

9. Assessment of the risk and protective factors associated with the young people's situations suggests that the majority of the sample faced high levels of adversity in their personal, family and environmental circumstances. A resilience based model of practice would suggest that greater attention must be given to identifying potential protective factors in the lives of young people in care rather than focusing on problems and obstacles to progress, as is so often the case. That being said, it is important that the pre-disposing factors that make children in care especially vulnerable to educational failure must be recognised. According to Jackson and Sachdev (2001), the low attainment of children in public care is a consequence of the failure to develop the concept of 'educationally-at-risk'. There has been ample evidence here of the extent to which the young people in

the sample were 'educationally-at-risk' (e.g. at risk of disruption, multiple school placements, school exclusion and truancy).

Recommendation – *Children in public care merit special consideration by virtue of their looked after status and the fact that they suffer disadvantage by the very nature of the consequences of being looked after. The concept of 'educationally-at-risk' should be adopted by local authorities and children cared for away from home should be encompassed in the definition of those requiring 'additional support for learning', as described in the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004.*

10. Findings relating to care workers' experiences of the LAC materials were mixed. It was apparent here, as in other research, that residential care staff were marginalized in the training and preparation process and this had a negative impact on their understanding of the method and their capacity to use the materials skilfully or in a way that promoted participation by all the relevant stakeholders (i.e. young people, parents, carers, social workers, other professionals and agencies). While there was broad agreement among the workers interviewed that the LAC approach was useful for engaging young people in work about their education it seemed that the participation of parents and other professionals did not occur on a meaningful level. The need to involve parents more fully in the care and educational arrangements of their children remains a constant challenge in this field and the findings suggest that much more preparation and training may be required to enable frontline staff to use the LAC materials more purposefully in this respect.

Recommendation –*Local authorities must ensure that carers are placed at the centre of training about the LAC materials to allow them to carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively. Among their responsibilities, carers should ensure that parents receive regular information about their children's progress in school, including end-of-session reports, and that they are given the opportunity to express their views.*

11. Despite an apparent lack of inter-professional participation, data obtained through interviews suggest that one of the major strengths of the LAC materials is their capacity to facilitate a sense of agreement about shared responsibilities and to clarify and record who is responsible for aspects of a young person's education plan. The degree of structure and focus that the materials bring to the process of planning young people's education arrangements is clearly one of their major strengths. It is therefore vital that the implementation of the LAC system is not seen purely as a matter for social work services but, rather, that the involvement of all agencies working with children and young people is actively encouraged. This requires commitment at senior management level and a broad strategic approach which encompasses both statutory and voluntary sector agencies as well as user-group input. There is some evidence that other key professionals and agencies are not well informed about the LAC system (Wheelaghan *et al.,* 1999) and there is clearly a need to provide inter-agency training and preparation for all professional using the materials.

Recommendation – *Training on the LAC materials must be organised on a joint basis, involving relevant bodies such as health and education, and delivered in a multi-professional, inter-agency context. Local authorities should also provide joint professional development for education and social work staff, and carers, to ensure that they are able to contribute effectively towards the implementation of policy more generally.*

Future Research

Inevitably, the findings and implications of this study suggest several directions for future research to refine and increase our knowledge of this complex area of investigation.

First, since it did not prove possible in this investigation, a detailed evaluation of the impact of the Assessment and Action Records on the educational progress of young people in public care remains a worthwhile and challenging possibility.

The effect of placement stability on the educational outcomes of children in public care continues to pose important questions and there is a need to develop more systematic techniques and measures to clarify this issue.

The literature relating to the LAC Materials includes a degree of criticism concerning their perceived inherent class and gender bias and it will be important to examine whether these factors affect their use in practice.

The results of this study and others continue to highlight the importance of inter-agency co-operation in the provision of education to children in public care. Many authorities have merged education and social work departments and it will be important to explore the impact of this on the educational experiences of children in their care.

Finally, this study did not attempt to explore the perceptions, views and feelings of the young people in the study and though there has been some recent work in this area (Harker *et al.,* 2003) there is an urgent need to develop more ethnographic models of enquiry to build up the stories and pictures of individual experiences of young people in public care.

Final Remarks

There seems little doubt that the public care system predominantly processes the children of the poor - research evidence is unequivocal on this point. The primary contextual conditions of children in care are social adversity, poverty and fractured families. The consequence of this fact leads to some discomforting conclusions about the likely outcomes for these children. The difficulties they experience at home inevitably intersect and overlap with their school experiences, usually to their disadvantage. Given their antecedents, it is likely that a proportion of children in care will always fare badly in educational terms. However, the findings and implications of this study contribute to knowledge about factors which help or hinder the educational performance of young people in public care. There is clearly a need to intervene early in the lives of our most disadvantaged children and we need to promote more effective, integrated, multi-professional provision to support the education of these children. Additionally, professionals need to learn to engage more effectively with the families of children in these circumstances to work out ways of resolving their difficulties without recourse to care placements. Finally, the effects of being excluded from school often compound the degree of social exclusion experienced by many children in public care. This is a matter of considerable regret and local authorities must ensure that they place those children for whom they have corporate responsibilities at the top of their agenda. If children and young people in public care continue to fail in terms of their educational performance, this will have implications which extend far beyond their schooling to their capacity to participate fully in society in later stages of their lives.

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Appendix 1

Data Schedule

The Education of Children in Care Research

Data Schedule

Young Person's Name .....

Current Placement .....

1. Reference Number

☐☐☐☐☐☐

- **SECTION ONE: GENERAL DETAILS**

2. Date of Birth

day☐☐ **month**☐☐ **year**☐☐

3. Age in years

☐☐

4. Gender ***(please tick the correct box)***

☐.....**male**

☐.....**female**

5. Ethnic Origin of the child ***(please tick)***

a☐.....**white european**

b☐.....**white other**

c☐.....**black caribbean**

d☐.....**black african**

e☐.....**black other**

f☐.....**chinese**

g☐.....**indian**

h☐.....**pakistani**

i☐.....**bangladeshi**

j☐.....**other asian**

k☐.....**not known**

l☐.....**other, specify**.....

6. Please indicate if the child has any of the following disabilities
(tick yes/no or not known and, if yes, describe the disability/problem)

	yes	details	no	not known
chronic health problem	☐	.....	☐	☐
learning disability	☐	.....	☐	☐
physical disability	☐	.....	☐	☐
psychological problem	☐	.....	☐	☐

(tick yes to psychological problem if seen by an educational psychologist/clinical psychologist/ psychiatrist or any attendance at a Department of Child and Family Psychiatry and give reasons if known)

• SECTION TWO: FAMILY BACKGROUND

7. Please describe the type of household in the child's family home. ***(please tick the correct box)***

nuclear family (both birth parents) ☐

single female parent family ☐

single male parent family ☐

reconstituted family (mother + child(ren) and father + child(ren)) ☐

stepfather family (mother + child(ren) and stepfather/cohabitee) ☐

stepmother family (father + child(ren) and stepmother/cohabitee) ☐

mixed family 1 (mother + child(ren) and stepfather/cohab + joint child(ren)) ☐

mixed family 2 (father + child(ren) and stepmother/cohab + joint children) ☐

other. specify..... ☐

not known ☐

8. Are any family members living away from home at this time?
(please tick the correct box)

☐.....yes ☐.....no ☐.....not known ☐.....not applicable

9. If YES please describe who they are, where they are living and why, if known. ***(e.g. if father is working away from home, sibling in care etc.)***

	Family member *(e.g. father, brother etc.)*	Living where?	Reason why?
Adult males			
Adult females			
Children			

10. What type of accommodation is the child's family living in?
(please tick the correct box. If the family is living with a relative please tick that box and also the type of house occupied)

☐.....local authority permanent ☐.....housing association

☐.....local authority temporary ☐.....private rented

☐.....owner occupied ☐.....hotel/ b&b/ hostel

☐.....relative's home ☐.....not known

☐.....other, specify.....

11. What is the main source of the household income? ***(please tick the correct box)***

☐.....salary/wages of 1 parent ☐.....salary/wages of 2 parents

☐.....state benefits ☐.....not known

☐.....other, specify.....

12. Do the family have financial difficulties? ***(please tick the correct box)***

☐.....severe financial difficulties ☐.....moderate financial difficulties

☐.....no financial difficulties ☐.....not known

13. Please state the approximate level of family income, if known. £..... per week

• SECTION THREE: SOCIAL WORK HISTORY

14. Please give the date of the young person's first referral to the social work department.

day☐☐ month☐☐ year☐☐

15. Who was the main source of the initial referral? ***(please tick the correct box)***

☐.....mother	☐.....father	☐.....both parents
☐.....other relative	☐.....neighbour	
☐.....G.P.	☐..... teacher	
☐.....health visitor	☐.....ed. psychologist	
☐.....police	☐.....reporter	
☐.....voluntary agency	☐.....not known	

☐.....other, please specify.....

16. What were the main reason(s) for the initial referral? ***(If more than one reason please rank in order i.e. 1, 2, 3 etc)***

	RANKING	
☐.....lack of parental care	☐.....health problems	☐.....physical abuse
☐.....sexual abuse	☐.....emotional abuse	☐.....offences
☐.....outwith parent control	☐.....exclusion from school	☐.....physical disability
☐.....failure to attend school	☐.....family difficulties	☐.....not known

☐.....other, please specify.....

17. Please give details of the young person's current placement.

Date of admission	Legal basis of placement	Reason for placement	Planned (P) or Emergency (E)

18. Where was the young person living before they were admitted to the current placement?
(please tick the correct box)

☐ .....at home ☐ .....with relatives

☐ .....foster care ☐ .....residential home

☐ .....community carers ☐ .....residential school

☐ .....other YPC

☐ .....other, please specify.....

19. Please give details of the young person's care history beginning with their first placement.
(for each placement indicate whether foster placement, YPC, residential school etc.)

Type of placemet (e.g. foster carers Y.P.C. etc)	Dates of placement Start	Finish	Legal basis of placement (e.g. sec 15 S.W.(S) Act)	Reason for placement	Planned (P) or Emergency(E)

• SECTION FOUR: SCHOOL CIRCUMSTANCES

20. Please give details of the school the young person was registered with at the end of the school year in June 1996.

Name of School	Date Admitted	Any Current Problems? (if yes, please specify)	Action Taken (please specify)

21. Are any special educational arrangements (such as transport) made for the young person? ***(please tick the correct box)***

☐ .....yes ☐ .....no ☐ .....not known

If yes, please give details below.

22. Was the young person temporarily excluded from school last year (95-96)? ***(please tick the correct box)***

☐ .....yes ☐ .....no ☐ .....not known

23. If the young person was temporarily excluded from school, please state for how long.

Exclusion	Number of days excluded
1	
2	
3	

24. Was the young person permanently excluded from school last year (95-96)? ***(please tick the correct box)***

☐.....yes ☐.....no ☐.....not known

25. Please give the date of exclusion

day☐☐ month☐☐ year☐☐

26. Please give details of all the previous schools attended by the young person beginning with the first (state whether primary or secondary) and state whether there were any school problems and, if so, what action was taken.

Name of School	Dates Attended Start	Finish	Any Problems? (if yes, please specify)	Action Taken (please specify)

SECTION FIVE: ASSESSMENT, PLANNING and REVIEWS

27. Has there been any formal assessment of the young person's educational needs during the school year 1995 - 1996? ***(please tick the correct box)***

☐ .....yes ☐ .....no ☐ .....not known

28. If yes, please state when.....

29. What did the assessment indicate? ***(please give details below)***

30. Have any specific plans been made for the young person's education?
(please tick the correct box)

☐ .....yes ☐ .....no ☐ .....not known

31. If yes, ***(please give details below)***

32. How many Child Care Reviews have been held for the young person since June 1995?

☐☐

33. At how many of these was a teacher present?

☐☐

34. At how many of these was an educational psychologist present?

☐☐

35. At how many of these was the young person's education discussed?

☐☐

36. What decisions were taken about the young person's education at each of these reviews? ***(please give details below)***

Review	Decisions Taken
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

37. Have these decisions been acted on? ***(please tick the correct box)***

☐.....yes ☐.....no ☐.....not known

38. If not, why not? ***(please give details below)***

39. Do you feel that enough is being done to support the young person's education? ***(please tick the correct box)***

☐.....yes ☐.....no ☐.....not known

40. If not, please indicate below what you feel needs to be done.

Signature of person completing form.....

Date.....

Position Held.....

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS FORM

Please return the completed form to:- Joe Francis, Department of Social Work, University of Edinburgh, Adam Ferguson Building, George Square, Edinburgh, EH8 9LL.

Appendix 2

ASSESSMENT AND ACTION RECORD

ASSESSMENT AND ACTION RECORD

Young person's name

Gender

Date of Birth **Day** **Month** **Year**

Current Placement

This assessment was coordinated by:

Name

Position

Date begun **Day** **Month** **Year**

Date completed **Day** **Month** **Year**

EDUCATION

The questions in this form are designed to find out if you are getting the help you need to make sure that you do as well at school as you are able to and that your education is being properly planned. They are also meant to find out if you have opportunities to learn special skills and to take part in a wide range of activities, both in and out of school. You might find it helpful to refer to your most recent school report when completing this section.

Person with Educational Responsibility

Sometimes a teacher or someone in the social work department will help to make sure that arrangements for your education are properly carried out. If someone like this is helping you, please write their name down here.

Name: ☐

Position: ☐

Later in this section the term 'Person with educational responsibility' will be used to describe this person.

E1 If part time, how many hours each week do you go to:

	Full time	Part Time	Hours?
Mainstream day school	☐	☐	☐☐
Special unit or class in a mainstream day school	☐	☐	☐☐
Special day school	☐	☐	☐☐
Home tuition or outreach teaching	☐	☐	☐☐
Residential school	☐	☐	☐☐
Other (please specify)	☐	☐	☐☐

☐

No school available ☐

Do you think you go to the sort of school that is right for you? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Currently being assessed ☐ No school

My attendance last year was as follows:

I could have attended ☐☐☐☐ sessions
but I actually attended ☐☐☐☐ sessions
I was absent for ☐☐☐☐ sessions
and of those, ☐☐☐☐ sessions
were, authorised absence because I had a genuine reason for not attending school.

What were the reasons for unauthorised absence?

Have you been excluded from school in the last year?

☐ Yes, permanently ☐ Yes, temporarily ☐ No

If temporarily excluded, for how many days? ☐☐ days

If you are permanently excluded, how long is it since you went to school? ☐☐ years ☐☐ months ☐☐ days

Who will take further action if needed?

☐ No further action needed because:

☐ Further action needed but not possible at present because:

Further action will be taken by:

☐ Young Person ☐ Parent(s)
☐ Foster carer(s) ☐ Social Worker

☐ Residential worker ☐ Person with education responsibility
☐ Other (please specify)

E2 Do you need help, equipment or adaptations to make sure you can get to school, hospital or health centre?

☐ Yes ☐ No **If no, go to E3**

If so, please describe:

Who will take further action if needed:

☐ No further action needed because:

☐ Further action needed but not possible at present because:

Further action will be taken by:

☐ Young Person ☐ Parent(s)
☐ Foster carer(s) ☐ Social Worker
☐ Residential worker ☐ Person with education responsibility
☐ Other (please specify)

E3 Do you have a difficulty with learning?

☐ No **If no, go to E4**
☐ Yes ☐ Currently being assessed ☐ Not sure

If difficulties have been identified, what extra help are you getting?

Do you need specialist learning materials or equipment at school or at home? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

Who will take further action if needed?

☐ No further action needed because:

☐ Further action needed but not possible at present because:

Further action will be taken by:

☐ Young Person ☐ Parent(s)
☐ Foster carer(s) ☐ Social Worker
☐ Residential worker ☐ Person with education responsibility
☐ Other (please specify)

E4 What do you enjoy most at school?

What do you like least about school?

What courses or subjects are you taking?

Do you, your teachers and your carer(s) all think you are doing as well as you can at school?

	Yes	No	Not sure
You	☐	☐	☐
Teacher	☐	☐	☐
Parent(s)	☐	☐	☐
Carer(s)	☐	☐	☐

Who will take further action if needed?

☐ No further action needed because

☐ Further action needed but not possible or appropriate at present because

Further action will be taken by:

☐ Young Person ☐ Parent(s)
☐ Foster carer(s) ☐ Social Worker
☐ Residential worker ☐ Person with education responsibility
☐ Other (please specify)

E5 How many times have you had an unscheduled change of school since you were five? (Try to give a number if you can, even if you are a bit doubtful).

Number ☐☐ ☐ Not sure

Who will take further action if needed?

☐ No further action needed because:

☐ Further action needed but not possible or appropriate because:

Further action will be taken by:

☐ Young Person ☐ Parent(s)
☐ Foster carer(s) ☐ Social Worker
☐ Residential worker ☐ Person with education responsibility
☐ Other (please specify)

E6 Do you read when you are not at school?

☐ Yes, comics ☐ Yes magazines or newspapers
☐ Yes, books ☐ No, but I would like to
☐ No, I'm not interested in reading

How many books do you have?

☐ Over 10 ☐ 6-10
☐ 1-5 ☐ None

How often do you borrow a book from the school or public library?

☐ About once a week ☐ About once a month
☐ Less than once a month ☐ Never

Who will take further action if needed?

☐ No further action needed?

☐ Further action needed but not possible at present because:

Further action will be taken by:

☐ Young Person ☐ Parent(s)
☐ Foster carer(s) ☐ Social Worker
☐ Residential worker ☐ Person with education responsibility
☐ Other (please specify)

E7 Who provides support with school work at home, and reminds you to do your homework?

☐ Young Person ☐ Parent(s)
☐ Foster carer(s) ☐ Social Worker
☐ Residential worker ☐ Person with education responsibility
☐ Other (please specify)

Who will take further action if needed?

☐ No further action needed because:

☐ Further action needed but not possible at present because:

Further action will be taken by:

- ☐ Young Person
- ☐ Parent(s)
- ☐ Foster carer(s)
- ☐ Social Worker
- ☐ Residential worker
- ☐ Person with education responsibility
- ☐ Other (please specify)

E8 Do you have a satisfactory place to do your homework?

- ☐ No homework
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Who will take further action if needed?

- ☐ No further action needed because:
- ☐ Further action needed but not possible at present because:

Further action will be taken by:

- ☐ Young Person
- ☐ Parent(s)
- ☐ Foster carer(s)
- ☐ Social Worker
- ☐ Residential worker
- ☐ Person with education responsibility
- ☐ Other (please specify)

E9 Which adult(s) go to your school to talk about your progress with the teachers and keep a record of decisions taken?

☐ Parent(s) ☐ Foster carer(s)
☐ Social Worker ☐ Person with education responsibility
☐ Residential worker
☐ Other (please specify)

Who will take further action if needed?

☐ No further action needed because:

☐ Further action needed but not possible at present because:

Further action will be taken by:

☐ Young Person ☐ Parent(s)
☐ Foster carer(s) ☐ Social Worker
☐ Residential worker ☐ Person with education responsibility
☐ Other (please specify)

E10 What school trips have you been on in the last year?

Who will take further action if needed?

☐ No further action needed because:

☐ Further action needed but not possible at present because:

Further action will be taken by:

☐ Young Person ☐ Parent(s)
☐ Foster carer(s) ☐ Social Worker
☐ Residential worker ☐ Person with education responsibility
☐ Other (please specify)

E11 Can you:

swim 50 metres?	☐ Yes	☐ Learning	☐ No
ride a bicycle?	☐ Yes	☐ Learning	☐ No
use a word processor?	☐ Yes	☐ Learning	☐ No

Do you take part in a particular sport, belong to a sports club and/or play in a team? If so, please give details:

Do you play a musical instrument and/or belong to a band, a group, an orchestra or a choir?

Do you have any other hobbies or interests outside schoolwork? If so give details:

Do you belong to any other clubs or organisations not mentioned above? If so give details:

Please say which activities are integrated (i.e. arranged for young people who have a disability or health condition as well as for those who do not):

Is there any club that you would like to join or skill you would like to learn? If so, please specify:

Who will take further action if needed?

☐ No further action needed because:

☐ Further action needed but not possible at present because:

Further action will be taken by:

☐ Young Person ☐ Parent(s)
☐ Foster carer(s) ☐ Social Worker
☐ Residential worker ☐ Person with education responsibility
☐ Other (please specify)

E12 Have you discussed your examination options, the courses you will be taking, and your plans for the future with your parent(s), carer(s) and your school?

☐ Not applicable, not old enough **If not applicable go to E13**
☐ Yes, with Parent(s) ☐ Yes, with carer(s)
☐ Yes, with school ☐ No

Who will take further action if needed:

☐ No further action needed because:

☐ Further action needed but not possible at present because:

Further action will be taken by:

☐ Young Person
☐ Parent(s)
☐ Foster carer(s)
☐ Social Worker
☐ Residential worker
☐ Person with education responsibility
☐ Other (please specify)

For young people aged fourteen and over

E13 Have you changed school since you started your examination course?

☐ Not started examination course yet
☐ No
☐ Not taking exams
☐ Yes

If yes, has all the course work that you did at your previous school been sent on to the one that you are at now?

☐ No course work
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not sure

Are you up to date with your course work?

☐ No course work
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not sure

If you have changed any exam syllabus because of the change of school, have you talked to your teachers about this?

☐ No changes ☐ Yes
☐ No

Who will take further action if needed?

☐ No further action needed because:

☐ Further action needed but not possible at present because:

Further action will be taken by:

☐ Young Person ☐ Parent(s)
☐ Foster carer(s) ☐ Social Worker
☐ Residential worker ☐ Person with education responsibility
☐ Other (please specify)

For young people aged fifteen and over

E14 Has your school arranged work experience for you?

☐ Not applicable, not old enough
☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you have a job (e.g. Saturday job, paper round)?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Will either your job or your work experience help you do the sort of work that you want to do when you leave school?

- ☐ No job or work experience
- ☐ Yes, the job will
- ☐ Yes, work experience will
- ☐ Neither will
- ☐ Not sure

If you would like a job, who will help you take further action if needed?

- ☐ No further action needed because:

- ☐ Further action needed but not possible at present because:

Further action will be taken by:

- ☐ Young Person
- ☐ Parent(s)
- ☐ Foster carer(s)
- ☐ Social Worker
- ☐ Residential worker
- ☐ Person with education responsibility
- ☐ Other (please specify)

ASSESSMENT OF OBJECTIVES: EDUCATION

The following section should be filled in by your key worker after s/he has talked about the answers with you and anybody else who is important to you. There is space at the end where you can say if anyone disagrees with what s/he has said. Where applicable, after answering the questions, look at your previous Assessment and Action Record to see how you have changed.

How far have the following objectives been met?

Objective 1: the young person's educational attainments match his/her ability

- ☐ Performance matches ability
- ☐ Performance somewhat below ability
- ☐ Performance seriously below ability
- ☐ Don't know

Objective 2: The young person is acquiring special skills and interests

- ☐ Many
- ☐ Some
- ☐ Few
- ☐ None
- ☐ Don't know

Objective 3: The young person is participating in a wide range of activities

- ☐ Wide range of activities
- ☐ Some activities
- ☐ Few activities
- ☐ No participation
- ☐ Don't know

Objective 4: Adequate attention is being given to planning the young person's education

- ☐ Satisfactory planning
- ☐ Some planning but not enough
- ☐ Little or no planning
- ☐ Don't know

Views on the assessment of education objectives 1-4

	Agree(s) fully	Agree(s) partially	Disagree(s)	Not consulted
Young Person	☐	☐	☐	☐
Parent(s)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Key Worker	☐	☐	☐	☐
Social Worker	☐	☐	☐	☐
Person with educational responsibility	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other	☐	☐	☐	☐
(please specify)				

If you do not agree, please give further details. Say who disagrees and why:

Date of completion day☐☐ month☐☐ year☐☐

N.B. (A further assessment should be completed in 6 months time)

Please record details about plans for future action and target dates in the summary below

Summary of work to be undertaken - To be brought to next review

Name: Date:

Education				
Work required	Persons responsible	Target date	Date completed	Decisions about actions that are desirable but cannot happen yet

Appendix 3

STAFF INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

'THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN IN CARE'

EVALUATING THE 'ASSESSMENT AND ACTION RECORDS'

STAFF INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Name: **Post:**

Unit:

Date of Interview:

As one of the few people who have had an opportunity to use these forms in practice, it would be very helpful to have your general views about them and how they affected your work.

1 With how many young people did you use the Assessment and Action Records?

2 Can you tell me a little about the preparation you received for using these forms.

3 Would you have liked additional preparation?

3a (If yes) What would have been useful for you?

4 Taking into account all the time you spent on it, including meetings with the young person or others, how long did it take you to complete the form?

5 **Beides yourself, who was involved in completing the Assessment and Action Record? e.g** -Young Person, Parent, Key-Worker, Relatives, Other ResidentialStaff, School Staff, Others?

5a **Do you feel it was important for others to be involved?**

5b **If so, in what way was it important?**

6 **Can you tell me what you think about the Layout of the form and whether it was helpfully structured or not,?**

7 **Do you think that the meaning of the questions was clear as far as you were concerned?**

7a **Do you feel that the young person could understand the meaning of the questions?**

8 **In your view, were all the questions on the form relevant?**

9 **Would you take out any of the questions on the form?**

10 **Would you add any questions to the form?**

11 **Do you feel that using the 'Assessment and Action Records' helped to improve co-ordination of educational arrangements for young people?**

12 Do you feel that using the forms encouraged parents to be more involved in their child's education?

12a What could have been done to improve the level of parent's involvement?

13 Do you think the forms help to clarify workers roles and responsibilities in relation young people's education?

14 Do you feel that using the form helped the young person to discuss their education needs?

14a What else could have been done to help the young person discuss their education?

15 Did you find that the form helped you to assess and identify the young person's educational needs?

16 Did the form help you to construct appropriate plans for the young person's education?

17 Did you use the form in Child Care Reviews to consider the education arrangements for the young person? If so did you find it helpful?

18 If no, do you think it would have been useful for discussing their education arrangements?

19 How do you think the form could have been used better for planning the young person's education?

20 **Do you feel that using the form was useful in any other aspects of your work with the young person?**

21 **Did you find that using the form helped to improve practice arrangements with schools?**

21a **Can you say how it was helpful or what could have been done to make it more helpful?**

22 **Did using the form help to improve practice arrangements with Educational Psychologists?**

23 **Can you tell me if you think that using the form helped to improve practice arrangements with other education agencies or professionals?**

23a **What do you feel could be done differently to improve the use of the forms with education professionals?**

24 **Do you think it would be helpful to use the Assessment and Action Records as a care planning tool for the education arrangements of all young people in care?**

25 **What were the two things you found <u>most</u> helpful about the materials?**

26 **What were the two things you found <u>least</u> helpful about the materials?**

27 **Are there any other comments that you would like to make about using the 'Assessment and Action Records'?**